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ABSTRACT

This report is an indepth study of the competency movement. It probes current methods of constructing, administering, evaluating, and explaining competency tests; it gives detailed accounts of specific state and local programs; it presents case histories that can enable the administrator and educator to benefit from the experience of others; and it shows samples of actual competency tests currently in use. Beginning with "What Is Competency Based Education?" the book goes on to examine legal problems that have arisen out of competency testing, such as cultural bias and insufficient preparation. It then examines implications and trends for the future. The report attempts to offer concrete ideas and information that can help schools implementing competency-based education programs avoid the pitfalls and develop a broad, up-to-the-minute response to the competency challenge. An appendix contains National Assessment of Educational Progress sample questions, a table summarizing state activity in minimal competency testing, and selected relevant resources. (Author/JM)

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Acknowledgment

The Competency Challenge is one of a series of Education U.S.A. Special Reports on current trends in school policies and programs. The purpose of the series is to provide school practitioners at all levels, and others concerned with education, with the most up-to-date information on the issues at the core of today's constantly changing education scene.

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Overview

When will the competency movement peak? Or has it?

During the past six years competency testing has mushroomed from the Oregon plan to reform education through community goal-setting on life skill requirements for high school graduates to hastily conceived, massive state testing programs on basic skills. Every state has wrestled with the problem of competency standards, and, as of this writing, 35 have taken steps to mandate or encourage competency testing. In most states the issue has been politically fomented—with state legislators and/or governors heeding public discontent over national reports of declining test scores and inadequately prepared high school graduates.

The demand that schools prove that students are competent before they graduate more often than not takes the form of a pencil and paper minimal competency test. While on the surface, requiring a test for graduation appears simple, the potential is great that it can turn into an educational or legal quagmire. Students denied a diploma may sue, charging that the graduation test is culturally biased or that they had not been given sufficient preparation for this new requirement. Or, the test content could be so elemental that it creates political problems, as is the case in New York where the proposed test was termed "laughable and deceptive." Competency tests can be hazardous if test content does not reflect the curriculum of the school district. In this instance, students are penalized for something they could not control, and schools are judged on areas they did not purport to teach.

All of these cautions were discussed in a report from the National Academy of Education to HEW Secy. Joseph Califano Jr. Released at a national conference on achievement testing and basic skills sponsored by HEW in the spring of 1978, the report warned that "any setting of statewide minimum competency standards for awarding the high school diploma—however understandable the public clamor which has produced the current movement—is basically unworkable, exceeds the

present measurement arts of the teaching profession and will create more social problems than it can conceivably solve." The report recommended, instead, that schools use diagnostic testing in the early grades and that more time be spent in the classroom on basic skills.

That report and the conference's strong decision that the federal government not get into the arena of a national testing program, even a voluntary one, probably will be looked on as the first brakes on the competency testing fervor. But although it may be slowed, competency testing is an accountability technique that will remain—in some form—a part of public education in the immediate future.

Chris Pipho, associate director of research for the Education Commission of the States at Denver, has kept a running update on competency based education since it began its spiraling climb two years ago. He told a staff seminar sponsored by the Institute for Educational Leadership that:

> Legislators have written a one-page law assuming that there is a test over there on the shelf and all we have to do is take it out and give it to the students. A fairly automatic process, no questions asked. Give the test and we're off and running. In doing so, the legislators don't understand the instruction, program and testing difficulties involved. Educators, on the other hand, don't really understand the very real pressure legislators are getting from their constituents.

Because Oregon has had the most extensive experience with the new wave of interest in competencies, *EDUCATION U.S.A.* asked Oregon State Supt. Verne Duncan to share his advice with other states and school districts beginning to develop their plans. He offered these guidelines:

- **Gain general agreement on the acceptability of a project** before attempting to implement it. You can count on the fact that mistakes will be made in the beginning, and having statewide support for the concept of competency-based education will help avoid a tendency to totally abandon the project.

- **Allow adequate time to field-test** and pilot various aspects of the program before mandating it in every school district. We found in Oregon that two years' preparation time was not sufficient for school districts. Because Oregon had no other models to follow, our competency program may have taken longer to implement than will be necessary for other states.

- **Be flexible, and allow for changes to be made.** In this state, at the end of the second year of implementation, it became apparent that several of our timelines for local districts were unrealistic. We therefore delayed some of them in order to allow local districts the necessary time to implement the program on a more realistic schedule.

- **Be explicit in the definition of what required competencies are.** Competencies which are defined as possession of skills, knowledge, and understanding will invariably lead to long lists of isolated basic skills and recall items. Such lists will become unmanageable as far as verification and recordkeeping simply because of the magnitude of the list. Competencies defined as the application of skills, knowledge and understanding to representative samples of life-role functions will lead to a manageable number of competencies. Even more, they will give evidence that students not only have proficiency in basic skills, but can apply those skills to situations which must be faced in the real world.

- **Learn from** the successes and failures of others.

In keeping with the last point, this report offers case studies of ways local districts and states have been meeting the competency challenge. Their experiences and advice illustrate the pluses and pitfalls inherent in education's latest attempt to satisfy society's goals.

Chapter 1.

What Is Competency-Based Education?

Competency-based education is considered by some to be the most influential development in education since the furor caused by Sputnik in the late 1950s. At least 30 states have taken some type of formal action on the issue; and local school districts—either under state mandate or by local initiative—are jumping on the competency bandwagon.

Interest in the competency movement has come from almost every conceivable constituency: employers complain they must offer on-the-job training in the basics for high school graduates, and colleges are offering an increasing number of remedial courses. Parents and teachers are concerned about declining test scores and taxpayers are rebelling against the rising cost of education in the face of declining enrollments and apparently declining results.

The competency movement is difficult to define. There is neither a single spokesperson nor a consensus about who needs it, when or why. It is a truly grassroots effort that is springing up nationwide for a variety of reasons. But the competency picture can be brought more clearly into focus through an examination of the forces that brought it to national prominence.

Origins of the Movement

Although terms like "minimal competency" and "competency-based education" have come into vogue only in the last few years, the concern over declines in basic skills began much earlier. George Weber, associate director of the Council for Basic Education, traces its roots to 1955, when Rudolf Flesch published his controversial book, *Why Johnny Can't Read.* Flesch's premise was that schools had abandoned phonics in favor of a "whole word" method of teaching reading.

"There were enough Johnnies having trouble with reading for the book to become an overnight sensation," Weber wrote in *Black Paper 1975,* a British publication that was critical of progressive education.

The next important milestone, according to Weber, came in 1969, when then-U.S. Comr. of Education James E. Allen Jr. stated the Right To Read program. "The significance of the event," Weber wrote, "is that, for the first time, a federal commissioner of education acknowledged serious deficiencies in reading attainment." In launching Right To Read, Allen pointed out that about half the nation's unemployed young people between the ages of 16 and 21 were functionally illiterate.

At the same time, public confidence in education began to nosedive. Since 1963, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores have fallen 49 points on the verbal section and 32 points on the math section. According to a panel commissioned by the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB), the pace of decline has accelerated since 1970. The panel examined a variety of possible reasons for the drop, but was unable to isolate any single cause. It speculated that the score decline from 1963 to 1970 was due largely to an increase in the number of poor-to-average students taking the test—students who previously would not have gone on to college.

Since 1970, however, the drop has been greater and "more pervasive," the panel says. Based on "circumstantial evidence," the panel points a finger squarely at a lack of emphasis on the basics. Noting that high school students were taking fewer traditional courses and more electives, the panel concluded "that less thoughtful and critical reading is being demanded and done, and that careful writing has apparently gone out of style."

The panel also concluded that schools have "lowered educational standards in the past decade," by tolerating absenteeism, giving more social promotions and less homework and using watered-down textbooks. About the only possible cause the panel **did** reject was a change in the tests themselves.

The SATs were not the only tests whose scores declined. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found disturbing declines in scores on its science and writing tests. Between its 1970 and 1974 writing assessments, NAEP found a slight improvement in writing by nine-year-olds, but it found that 13- and 17-year-olds were writing more incoherent paragraphs with a shorter, "primer-like" style. The same age groups were tested in science in 1969-70 and 1972-73. Declines on the second assessment represented a loss of one-half year of learning, according to NAEP.

Although some critics are skeptical of national test results, the general public sees the declining scores as a cause for concern. In the 1976 Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, 59% said they felt the decline in national test scores meant that the quality of education was declining. When asked what should be done to

improve schools, 51% said schools should "devote more attention to the teaching of basic skills." A total of 65% favored giving a nationwide standardized test for high school graduation.

Employers are another group which is concerned about a decline in the competence of today's students. Robert McBride, former president of the National Assn. of State Boards of Education, interviewed personnel directors of five large businesses. Three of the five companies said they are finding it necessary to provide remedial training in the basic skills to high school graduates and—in some cases—to college graduates. According to McBride, the executives reported that the job applicants were unable to spell, to do simple arithmetic computations and to write or speak standard English. The companies added that the problems were found among all races and from graduates of rural and suburban as well as city schools. Two employers commented that student performance and achievement were "worse than is related by the press."

The call to go *back-to-basics* is also attributed to greater parent involvement in the schools, the increasing number of teacher strikes and the growing incidence of violence and vandalism in schools. Some also see an unstable economy as a reason. As the job market continues to tighten, parents become more concerned that their children will not be able to find jobs. In this circumstance, the school curriculum—and student performance—comes under closer scrutiny than perhaps it would in more prosperous times.

Perhaps prompted by the recession, schools are also increasingly the target of malpractice suits. Students are first graduating from schools, and then charging—after the fact—that they are "functionally illiterate." In the first, and most famous lawsuit—the Peter W. case (originally called Peter Doe)—the parents charged that their son had received above average grades and that nothing in his record indicated that he had a reading problem. The court ruled against the plaintiffs, holding that factors beyond the control of the school also influence student performance.

This general dissatisfaction has nurtured the accountability movement, which tries to bring such business techniques as management-by-objectives to the schools. Accountability is a close relative to competency. In fact, the Florida law that sets minimum graduation requirements is called The Educational Accountability Act.

"The competency movement has three separate components," says Tommy Tomlinson, senior associate with the National Institute of Education. "The decline in test scores reflects a concern about **excellence.** Complaints from business and the military reflect a concern for **competence.** And complaints from taxpayers and politicians reflect a concern for **efficiency.**"

Competency: Not One, But Three Issues

At the heart of the competency movement is the concern that schools are graduating young people who are incapable of functioning adequately in modern American society. When the functionally illiterate receive high school diplomas, the argument goes, the diploma becomes meaningless. To cope with this problem, three solutions have been proposed.

- The general public asserts that schools are offering too many frills that interfere with learning the three R's. "If schools would just go **back-to-basics** and abandon all those evil innovations," they say "kids would become proficient in the basic skills."

- When the general public's cry for the basics reaches a state legislature, the issue assumes the name **"minimal competency."** If the problem is "rubber diplomas," as some educators have called them, the solution is to give a test as the final "hurdle" for high school graduation. The test adds validity to the high school diploma by documenting precisely which skills the student can perform.

- Beyond minimal competency is a vastly more complicated issue known as **competency-based education** (CBE). Here, educators and the community sit down together to establish goals and objectives that attempt to define "what a high school graduate should know." These objectives—or competencies—must be demonstrated by each student and recorded in the student's file in order to achieve a diploma. Instead of a single test to decide high school graduation or grade to grade promotion, CBE—in its pure form—calls for a fundamental restructuring of schools away from letter grades and academic credits and towards demonstrating competencies in skills needed in everyday life outside of school.

The competency debate, in effect, involves three different groups arguing for different solutions. There is some overlap, but the differences are substantial enough that the wise educator or state policymaker should take a close look at all three options before stepping into the fray. The results of each approach can be quite different.

Back (Forward?) to Basics

Parents who support the back-to-basics movement usually favor a return to traditional teaching styles, including more homework and rote

memorization. Walls are going up in some open space schools and districts with liberal alternative schools are being pressured to set up fundamental schools as other alternatives. Such schools stress discipline and patriotism in addition to the three Rs.

Many educators also favor renewed emphasis on the basics. School administrators responding to an *Education U.S.A.* survey on the subject said their schools were eliminating mini-courses, demanding more "critical thinking" from students and assigning more homework. Many who said competency is **not** an issue in their community added, "We never left the basics."

The National Education Assn. (NEA), in a spot survey, found that teachers across the country are placing renewed emphasis on spelling lists, grammar, composition and multiplication tables. According to NEA communications manager Lyle Hamilton, "basics" is a pendulum swing away from the extreme of the 1960s, when the push was to make courses relevant and "fun" for students. The tendency now is to tell students that not everything that needs to be learned is either easy or fun.

A new NEA pamphlet, *Learning is Hard Work*, contains these words for both teachers and parents:

> School is a place of learning. It is not a place of entertainment or relaxation, like a theater or like the beach. That means that school is essentially a workplace and that the pleasure to be derived from school is integrally related to the satisfaction derived from accomplishing a hard job. That means, too, that a day at school can sometimes be routine and tiresome.
>
> Learning is hard work. And the future of all of us—students, parents, teachers and the community at large—depends on it.

Minimal Competency

Unlike back-to-basics, which focuses on curriculum and teaching methods, minimal competency relies on testing. While the push for basics has come from parents and teachers, the rush to set minimal competency standards has emanated from state legislatures and state boards of education, as well as some members of Congress.

In several states, a test is required for either high school graduation or grade-to-grade promotion. In others, tests are used to identify students who need remedial help.

In some cases the state develops the test; in others, the test is developed by local school districts. The consistent characteristic is that the written test is based on minimum standards.

Competency-Based Education

While minimal competency tends to focus exclusively on testing, competency-based education (CBE) is a broad approach that seeks to relate school district goals to what actually happens in the classroom. The most comprehensive definition of CBE was formulated by W. G. Spady of the National Institute of Education, in conjunction with H. D. Schalock and W. E. Hathaway of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. As they define CBE, the key elements are:

- The insistence that a minimum (non-negotiable) set of outcomes (competencies) that are the desired results from schooling be defined in terms of the ability of students to function effectively in life roles outside of school.

- The requirement that the attainment of this minimum set of outcomes be demonstrated as a standard for graduation from high school.

- The requirement that performance in relation to the minimum set of outcomes be summarized and displayed as part of the certification process.

The required set of competencies is mutually agreed on by educators and the community. Both also agree upon benchmarks—known in Oregon as performance indicators—by which the competencies will be measured. The competencies and performance indicators are made known to the students in advance, so they know what is expected of them.

In traditional programs, time is held constant and achievement varies. High school sophomores, for example, are given one year to learn geometry, and some students will learn more geometry than others. In CBE, achievement is held constant and time varies. Like mastery learning, CBE means that a student continues to work on an objective until it is mastered. This requires individualized instruction that tailors the subject matter to the learning rate of each student. The ideal in this type of system is to provide a challenge to brighter students, who master the skills quickly, while offering alternative strategies to slower students. The bottom line is a mastery of fundamental skills, but the goal is to teach beyond the minimums.

Although everyone involved in the competency movement is interested in improving performance in the basic skills, wide gaps separate the proposed solutions. At one end of the competency continuum is the

fundamental school with its group recitation and memorization; at the other end is an alternative school that allows students to demonstrate competencies gained outside the traditional classroom.

Defining Competency

Competency is a kind of motherhood and apple pie word around which everyone can rally. "Can you imagine anyone favoring incompetency-based education?" asks James Popham of the U. of California at Los Angeles. Although the idea in the abstract is a popular one, finding agreement on a definition is no easy task.

The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines "competent" as "properly or well qualified, capable, adequate for the purpose." The definition is straightforward enough; the problem comes in pinpointing the purposes that students should be "adequate for."

One popular approach directs schools to identify competencies that students will need to "survive" in modern American society. Although Oregon began this approach, William Worrell, superintendent of the LeGrande, Ore., Public Schools, cautions others not to repeat this "dumb mistake. A case can be made that people can survive in society without many of the skills educators find necessary and desirable," Worrell says. "Not one community in Oregon has satisfactorily arrived at a definition of *survival*."

Another problem is an intermixing of the terms "competency" and "proficiency." Worrell defines proficiency as the **mastery** of basic skills and knowledge. Competency, by contrast, is the **ability to apply** basic skills to a problem or real-life situation, he says. Adding 2 + 2 is a proficiency; using that proficiency to solve a word problem or to make a purchase is a competency.

One question raised by the survival issue is whether or not a minimal competency test will measure "school skills" or "life skills." Academic skills are those needed to succeed in later grades of school, while life skills are those needed to succeed in life beyond school. Solving a word problem is a school skill; balancing a checkbook is a life skill.

The primary concern of the public, however, is that students seem to be losing the ability to read, write and compute.

What Is Basic?

Speakers at a recent annual meeting of the National Assn. of State Boards of Education posed diverging definitions of "basic education."

Math Supervisors Define Math Basics

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics appointed a task force to develop a position paper on basic math skills out of a concern that schools were placing emphasis on computation to the exclusion of other important skills. The position paper lists 10 skills the council considers "basic".

- **Problem Solving:** Students should be able to solve problems in situations which are new to them.
- **Applying Mathematics to Everyday Situations:** Students should be able to use mathematics to deal with situations they face daily in an ever-changing world.
- **Alertness to Reasonableness of Results:** Students should learn to check to see that their answers to problems are "in the ball park."
- **Estimation and Approximation:** Students should learn to estimate quantity, length, distance, weight, etc.
- **Appropriate Computational Skills:** Students should be able to use the four basic operations with whole numbers and decimals and they should be able to do computations with simple fractions and percents.
- **Geometry:** Students should know basic properties of simple geometric figures.
- **Measurement:** Students should be able to measure in both the metric and customary systems.
- **Tables, Charts and Graphics:** Students should be able to read and make simple tables, charts and graphs.
- **Using Mathematics to Predict:** Students should know how mathematics is used to find the likelihood of future events.
- **Computer Literacy:** Students should know about the many uses of computers in society and they should be aware of what computers can do and what they cannot do.

"Long computations will usually be done with a calculator, but computation is still important," the position paper says. "Mental arithmetic is a valuable skill. Computational skills by themselves are of little use, but when used with other skill areas, they give the learner basic mathematical ability."

It urges teachers to use a variety of teaching methods—like hands-on experience with physical objects—in addition to drill and practice for learning basic skills.

A. Graham Down, executive director of the Council for Basic Education, defined basics in terms of subject areas: English (reading, writing, speaking), history, math, science, world culture and art. Other speakers defined basics in such broad terms as "disciplined thought that can recognize a fraudulent person or idea" or "greater self-reliance and adaptation to technological change." "Basic education," said Arleigh Richardson, former director of the National Humanities Faculty, "should teach children to feel strongly, think clearly and know the difference between the two."

A prestigious panel on the Arts, Education and Americans, after a two-year study, declared that "the arts are basic to individual development, since they, more than any other subject, awaken all the senses—the learning pores."

Such lofty considerations are good to keep in mind for the school district that has the luxury of establishing its own minimum requirements for high school graduation. Increasingly, however, "the basics" are being defined by state boards of education and legislators as reading, writing and computation. Many states allow local districts to set competencies in additional areas if they wish.

Positive Aspects of the Competency Movement

The increased attention given to student achievement in the basic skills will, it is hoped, improve student performance in these areas. If performance does improve measurably, it will renew confidence in the schools and in the high school diploma. Minimal competency testing and teaching to competency-based objectives can also call attention to students having difficulties who may have been overlooked in the past. Most of the schools instituting competency testing offer remedial help to those students who fail the test.

Some proponents also see the concern over competency as a healthy counterbalance to the extremes of the 1960s, when electives proliferated in an effort to be "relevant" to students. *Time* magazine visited three suburban high schools and found courses like "Great Sleuths" and "Exploring the Occult" were drawing more students than demanding physics and foreign language courses. Administrators responding to the *Education U.S.A.* survey noted that the interest in competency was leading teachers to expect more from students. In such an atmosphere, more frivolous courses may begin to fall out of favor with students and parents.

In competency-based education, clearly defining the outcomes expected of students will help ensure that teachers of the same subject are covering the same material. According to Oregon's William Worrell, agreement on goals and performance indicators also leads to increased communication among teachers at all grade levels to ensure a logical progression of course work. Because it is oriented towards mastering sequential objectives, CBE also encourages individualization of instruction. When done correctly, individualization challenges brighter students while guaranteeing that slower students are not left behind, he says.

Hazards and Pitfalls

Although individualized instruction holds much promise, some teachers think it is possible to have too much of a good thing. If the total curriculum is individualized, students may never learn group skills like following directions and working together. It can make things difficult for the music teacher trying to teach songs and the physical education teacher in charge of team sports if the students spend most of their school day working independently.

Another problem inherent in both CBE and individualization is that they will require expanded inservice training for teachers. Declining enrollments in many school districts have reduced the influx of new teachers who were exposed to individualization in college. Many of the older teachers may resist attempts to change their teaching methods.

Perhaps the biggest stumbling block to individualized instruction is the cost. Some have estimated that it can increase an education budget from one-third to one-half because additional teachers and aides are needed. Districts favoring back-to-basics as a way to cut costs may merely give lip service to the concept of individualization or reject it altogether.

Some people fear that the effort to pinpoint competencies will lead to a dehumanized and mechanistic school curriculum. This danger is present whether the goal is competency-based education or minimal competency testing. In the case of testing, the tendency will be to focus on skills that are easily measured, such as spelling and computation. In that process, creativity and motivation may be overlooked, and the arts may be downgraded as less important. Paul Pottinger of the Institute for Competency Assessment sees the traits threatened by CBE: "The ability to relate to others effectively, to empathize with others, to engage in moral reasoning, to accept responsibility and to analyze, synthesize and develop strategies in problem resolution."

One drawback of CBE is that it will greatly increase record-keeping because each student's attainment of each competency must be verified and recorded. A similar problem with competency testing is that a proliferation of tests will further deplete the amount of class time a teacher has to spend on the basics.

A school could conceivably test its students with a statewide assessment, a national norm-referenced achievement test or a criterion-referenced minimal competency test. Many see state-mandated competency tests as a threat to the autonomy of the local school board. Because each district will want to perform well on the state test, their curriculum may be modified to conform to the test content. A parallel fear is that teachers will begin to teach to the test, particularly if job security is tied to student performance.

In most states, competency testing is oriented towards minimum standards, which leads to a fear that the minimum standards will also become the maximum that is expected of students. Others argue that denying diplomas to those who fail minimum competency tests only throws an additional burden in the path of disadvantaged students.

Finally, there is a fear among test experts that both the tests and their results will be used incorrectly. Many argue that the "state of the art" of test construction falls far short of achieving the goals that state legislators and boards of education assume they can accomplish.

Chapter 2.

Measuring Competencies

Once the decision is made to measure student competencies, a number of questions must be resolved before a testing program can begin. Henry Brickell, director of *Policy Studies in Education,* raised seven complex questions at a minimal competency conference sponsored by the Education Commission of the States:

- What competencies will you require?
- How will you measure them?
- Whan will you measure them?
- How many minimums will you set?
- How high will you set the minimum?
- Will they be for schools or for students?
- What will you do about the incompetent?

Choosing the Competencies

Although many state legislatures are mandating some form of competency test in reading, writing and computation, Brickell offers four alternatives in addition to testing "basic skills." Tests can be given in school subjects, life areas (like citizenship or family life), basic skills applied in each school subject or in each life area. It is not practical to test all five types of competencies, he said, so schools must choose. But each choice has inherent pitfalls.

"Unless you test in school subjects," Brickell says, "teachers of art, music, science, foreign languages and vocational subjects will have no minimum standards."

"Unless you choose to test in life areas," he continues, "teachers can teach about school and not about life."

"Unless you choose basic skills applied in school, students may spell a list of words correctly in English class and misspell them in their science laboratory notebooks. And unless you choose basic skills applied in life," Brickell adds, "students may learn to add and subtract, but be unable to balance their checkbooks."

Scott Thomson, deputy executive director of the National Assn. of Secondary School Principals, advises a small scale approach. "School districts that begin with modest ambitions for competency testing are usually the most satisfied with their programs," he writes in *Catalyst*, a journal for Nebraska administrators. "Emphasis should be upon confirming that the basic skills—literacy and computation—are being adequately taught." Thomson favors testing basics in life skill areas, like reading a driver's license manual or prescription drug label.

Choosing the Test

Once the school has decided **what** to test, it must decide **how** to test. Brickell suggests four alternatives:

- Actual performance situations;
- Simulated performance situations;
- School products and performances;
- Paper and pencil tests.

The test of actual performance on the job or in a later grade of school is the "ideal" test in terms of reliability, Brickell says. Unfortunately, such tests are expensive, take years and the results come back too late to help either the student or the school. Simulated performance situations are better, but the results may not match the situation perfectly, and they are more expensive and more time-consuming than a pencil and paper test.

Another option is to study student products, like paintings, experiments, essays, clarinet solos or brake jobs. The problems with these measures, according to Brickell, are that the student usually has had

help, the pressures of testing are missing and it is hard to score the results.

Paper and pencil tests, which are the easiest and cheapest method, "measure a narrow band of knowledge or skill and are far removed from actual performance situations," he says. Because of this, the results may not accurately predict success in school or in life because that success often "depends on attitudes, values, personal warmth, leadership, creativity, physical strength and other things a person cannot show with a piece of paper and a pencil." Brickell said schools could use paper and pencil tests to measure school skills and use simulated performance situations to test life skills.

When To Test

Competency tests may be given at several different levels to determine promotion from one grade to the next or to determine high school graduation. Florida now gives a statewide test which, together with local standards, determines promotion from the third, fifth, eighth and eleventh grades. Florida students will have to pass a statewide "functional literacy test" in order to graduate.

The Denver Public Schools have required its graduates to pass a four-part Proficiency and Review Test since 1960. Denver's supervisor of testing, Allan Hosler, advises other school districts not to wait until the 12th grade to start giving the test. During the 18 years Denver has been using the test, the district has moved from 12th to ninth grade for its first administration of the test. Students have two opportunities to take the test during the year and those who fail are given remedial help in reading and math. Students must only repeat the failed section. Through retesting and remediation, Denver has reduced its failure rate to 1.5%, Hosler says. (This does not include students who drop out or fail to graduate for lack of course credits.) Also, former students may return at any time to take the test at a high school or in Hosler's office.

Denver is piloting a "checkpoint test" for third and sixth graders that is designed to measure "what the average third or sixth grader should know," Hosler says. Test results do not affect promotion but will instead be used for remedial purposes.

Minimum Standards

The competency movement has grown out of a desire that all high school graduates be "minimally competent" before they receive high

school diplomas. But the issue of "minimal competence" implies a single minimum standard, regardless of varying ability. Brickell points out that a single standard can be "too hard for the dull student . . . and trivial for the bright student and thus not motivating." The solution of a standard that is graduated according to ability solves these problems, he says, but creates others. "A graduated standard will grant a diploma to a dull but energetic student who gets 40 points on the exam and refuse a diploma to a bright but lazy student who gets 60 points on the exam," he notes. Compounding the problem is the fact that current ability tests "may not give fair and accurate measures of achievement," Brickell says. One solution may be to set a low minimum for every student regardless of ability, and a graduated minimum for students of above-average ability.

New York state has developed a system along these lines with a combination of minimum competency tests and regents examinations. Beginning in 1979, students will have to pass minimum competency tests in reading and math in order to receive a regular diploma. Additional tests will be required of the graduating class in 1980. For many years, however, the State Board of Regents has offered a number of subject area examinations. Students who passed several of these tests and who completed additional course work qualified for the Regents Diploma, which is more prestigious than a regular diploma.

Whether there will be one standard or many, the problem remains of how to arrive at a fair and equitable minimum. Gene Glass, professor of education at the U. of Colorado, opposes minimum standards on the grounds that any minimum cut-off score is necessarily arbitrary. "My fields of testing and psychology are incapable of giving any reasonable or safe answers to the questions, 'How much must a pupil know to succeed in life?' and 'What is the minimal level of proficiency that ought to be required of graduating seniors?'" he says.

One problem, according to Glass, is that there is an *unbroken continuum* between competence and incompetence. To choose one point on the continuum as the minimal cut-off score is unrealistic and unfair, he says. A second problem with setting cutoff scores is that test questions can vary in difficulty. As an example, he says, 86% of New Jersey seventh graders were able to correctly complete a vertical addition problem, but only 46% could do a horizontal addition problem. "The vagaries of teaching and measurement are so poorly understood that the *a priori* statement of performance standards is foolhardy," Glass says.

Certainly, setting minimum standards is not without its hazards. If the questions are too easy, the tests can be an embarrassment to the district or state. If they are too hard, the number of students who fail may be politically untenable. Brickell suggests setting a tentative passing

DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Division of Education
Department of Development and Evaluation

PROFICIENCY AND REVIEW TESTS

Nine sample multiple choice questions are presented below. Each is similar to, but not identical with, actual questions on these tests. The correct answers are given at the bottom of the page.

Numerical Proficiency

Add the following sets of numbers:

1.
897
769
534
+658

A 2757
B 2758
C 2848
D 2858
E None

2. $3\frac{1}{4}+5\frac{1}{8}+9\frac{1}{2}=$

F $17\frac{3}{14}$
G $17\frac{7}{8}$
H $18\frac{3}{4}$
I 19
J None

3. $51.76+0.204=$

K 0.538
L 5.38
M 51.964
N 53.8
O None

Spelling Proficiency

If a word is misspelled, encircle the letter in front of it. If you think that all the words are spelled correctly, encircle the letter in front of the word None.

4.
A advantage
B palace
C lettice
D wealth
E None

5.
F silence
G century
H advertise
I allmost
N None

6.
K possible
L visitor
M create
N grocery
O None

Language Proficiency

This test includes one or more of the following types of errors: capitalization, punctuation, and grammar. Each line below is numbered and represents one test question. Mark each line according to the following key:

C for an error in capitalization
P for an error in punctuation
G for an error in grammar
N for no error

7. Has he went to buy the
8. hot dogs. The Labor Day picnic will be held
9. in Rocky Mountain National Park on monday.

Correct Answers

1-D; 2-G; 3-M; 4-C; 5-I; 6-O; 7-G; 8-P; 9-C

The Denver test also contains a reading proficiency section, in which students read a passage and determine whether statements agree, disagree or are "neither stated nor suggested in the passage."

2-

score and giving the test a trial run. If scores are too low, he says, the district can either lower the standard or raise the ability level of the students.

H. A. Wilson, director of exercise development for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), suggests three alternatives in setting the passing score on a minimum competency test. The most common—and worst—method, Wilson says, is for one or more persons in positions of power to set the passing score **by fiat.**

"While such decisions may be made with the best of intentions," Wilson writes in the *NAEP Newsletter,* "they are based on little more than expert (or not-so-expert) intuitions. They have no demonstrable relationship to reality (validity) and are simply the more or less carefully weighed opinions of one or, at most, a few individuals."

A slightly better method, according to Wilson, is to arrive at the score by consensus of a representative group of individuals with relevant experience. Although this method may not be perfect, he says, at least it reflects currently held beliefs.

The third alternative is to pilot test an "external criterion" group and use their performance as a basis for setting the score. While this approach is least likely to lead to serious error, it is also the most difficult and most expensive, Wilson says. The first problem to be solved is to agree on the appropriate criterion group. Among those that have been considered are: graduating seniors from "good" high schools, junior college freshmen, entry-level employes in a group of businesses or industries, or armed forces inductees. "Each group has its proponents and rationale, but there is little widespread acceptance of any candidate," Wilson writes.

The Palm Beach County (Fla.) Public Schools are using the Adult Performance Level (APL) test as a minimum competency exam. In setting a minimum acceptable score, the school district determined that high school graduates should score above the level attained by dependent adult groups. According to Gloria Kuchinskas, director of compensatory and developmental programs, the APL was given to inmates attending classes at the Glades Correctional Institute, adult basic education students, adults enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and unemployed adults looking for work. The raw scores from these groups ranged from 37.7 (ESL students) to 52.8 (inmates). The Palm Beach County minimum was set at a raw score of 53, or 70% correct.

Other criteria considered by the district were:

- There should be evidence that most citizens scoring at the minimum can live productive lives.

- The minimum score must be below the "national median" for the APL test.

"By definition," says Kuchinskas, "Fifty percent of any group is below the median for that group. Also, millions of people who score below the national average on tests live good and productive lives."

Performance below the minimum level and denial of a diploma are not and should not be described as absolutely predicting an unproductive or dependent life, she adds. They indicate:

- That the probability of a satisfying and productive life is sharply reduced;
- That the student and his or her family should realistically reassess aptitudes and attitudes in order to help improve the performance level;
- That the school will not award a diploma because it would mislead the student as to his or her readiness for adult responsibilities.

Is the Standard for Schools or Students?

According to Brickell, competency tests can measure schools or they can measure students. For example, a state may set standards which say a school program is acceptable if 70% of the students can answer certain questions correctly. The danger in this approach is that it fails to address the needs of the 30% who miss the questions.

The decision to evaluate schools or students "determines whether you will write test items all students can pass or only those most students can pass," Brickell says. It also affects "whether you will report results to each individual parent or only to the general public, and whether you will modify every unsatisfactory program, or fail and recycle every unsatisfactory graduate."

The decision also makes a difference in "costs, types of tests, demands on the professional staff to teach every student, pressures on each student to succeed and political action by parents of each student who fails," he concludes.

What About Incompetents?

In any competency program, there will be those who do not meet the standards. Brickell points out that the possible remedies are the same whether the problem is incompetent students or incompetent schools:

- Verify the findings independently.
- Give them several more chances.
- Lower the standard.
- Remediate students so they can pass, or redesign the program so the school can operate.
- Refuse to promote or graduate students or close the schools.
- Promote or graduate the students with a restricted diploma or let the schools operate but refuse to accredit them.

Schools with successful competency programs incorporate a combination of Brickell's suggestions. Denver gives students remediation and several opportunities to pass the Proficiency and Review Test. Those who still do not pass are given a certificate of attendance rather than a diploma.

Standardized Tests: A Cauldron of Controversy

While states are rushing to require testing to verify student competencies, a growing number of education groups are questioning the validity and usefulness of standardized tests. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the Assn. for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and NEA have passed resolutions opposing various kinds of testing and more than 40 education and lay groups have joined the National Consortium on Testing, dedicated to the reduction or removal of standardized tests from elementary and secondary schools.

NCTE in November 1977 passed a resolution opposing legislatively-mandated competency testing on the grounds that such testing "overlooks alternative ways to determine students' growth and achievement." The resolution goes on to say that "few of the assumptions underlying competency-based education have been substantiated in practice, theory or research."

The English teachers also criticized an "excessive focus on subskills" that they said characterize some aspects of the competency movement. While some school systems have gained national fame for doing away with social promotions, NCTE asserted that these new promotion policies require the "teaching and testing of isolated skills in reading and writing, with little value placed on students' comprehensive ability to read and write.

"The sequencing of skills is either arbitrarily formulated or is dictated by the content of specific management systems or standardized achievement tests," NCTE said, adding that there is "no evidence" to indicate that such an approach leads to competence in language use. Also, this trend represents "a narrowing of the curriculum" which produces classrooms where "drill and testing predominate."

The concern over a narrowed curriculum has also been voiced by Joseph Califano Jr., secretary of the Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare. "Not all skills are basic skills," Califano told an annual meeting of the College Entrance Examination Board. "In focusing on minimal competency, we cannot let the minimum become the maximum. We must ensure that students of ability are given the chance to develop to the fullest, and that important subjects beyond the three Rs are not overlooked."

ASCD has sharply criticized a proposal in Congress to create a national competency test and national standards. "It is a sad commentary on our national lack of imagination that we are responding to poor test performance by our children by making them take yet another test," says ASCD Exec. Dir. Gordon Cawelti. The curriculum developers oppose national standards because they say they could weaken local control over education. ASCD doubts that another test will contribute substantially to the "already abundant knowledge of pupil performance or lack of it," Cawelti says. Further, because states are taking the lead in competency testing, ASCD feels the prudent course for Congress is to wait and see what the state-level competency activity produces.

At their 1976 annual conference, ASCD called for "alternative approaches" to measuring basic competencies and advocated "a general moratorium" on norm-referenced standardized tests.

Perhaps more compelling than the statements from education groups are the results of various studies on testing. Although much of the competency legislation is geared to identifying students in need of remedial help, an Educational Testing Service (ETS) study has concluded that test scores are a poor indicator of which pupils need compensatory education. Conducted by Robert Feldmesser of ETS for the National Institute of Education, the study concludes that socioeconomic status—especially the parents' years of education—is a better yardstick for measuring compensatory education needs. Feldmesser suggests that over-reliance on test scores "could create temptations to manipulate them to receive increased funding."

Tests are also ineffective in predicting adult success, according to Douglas Heath, Haverford (Pa.) College psychology professor. Heath studied several hundred young men, first at age 17 and then at age 34. All of them were "technically competent" (a trait measurable by tests),

but many had difficulty in personal relationships and were bored and unfulfilled in their jobs. Those who were most successful, Heath says, could "express feelings and emotions, knew their own strengths and weaknesses and had the capacity to identify with others."

The current wave of testing may "actually impair the development of mature adults," Heath says, by testing memory recall, which is easy to measure, and ignoring more important traits. The traits which should be measured are intellectual curiosity, logical thinking, the ability to analyze problems and learn from experience, and the ability to get along with others, he says. Schools are failing to develop these traits, Heath adds. He cites a study of New England schools that examined intellectual curiosity. The study found that 43% of the fourth graders were interested in learning, but by 12th grade only 13% were intellectually curious. Achievement tests are important, Heath concludes, but they are only one measure of what it takes to become a competent adult.

A Litany of Problems

The single measure aspect is a key issue among those who oppose standardized tests and competency examinations. Michael Patton, director of the Minnesota Center for Social Research, warns against making major decisions about a child's future based on a single test score. Many things can affect a child's score on a test, he says, such as the way the child feels that day and whether there is a fire drill in the middle of the test.

Congress recognized the limitations of testing when it included a provision in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) that forbids placement of a child in a special education program based on results from a single test.

Another frequently voiced concern is that the test may not reflect the content of the local curriculum. School districts should be careful when selecting standardized tests so the test objectives match the district's objectives. If they don't, the test may measure things the district did not try to teach.

The importance of analyzing test content is underscored by a study that revealed major differences in the four most widely used standardized tests. The Institute for Research on Teaching (IRT) at Michigan State U. analyzed the fourth-grade math sections of the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Iowa), the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) and the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS).

While the Iowa test contained 40% story problems, CTBS had only 22% of this kind of problem. Only 22% of the Iowa test was simple

NEA Guidelines

The National Education Assn. has developed guidelines for state minimal competency mandates. The guidelines say states should encourage local districts to develop a "profile of data" on each student, including such things as: professional judgment of teachers and other specialists, sample products of the student's work, interviews of students, student self-evaluation, the completion of student contracts and work-study evaluations.

When written tests are used, NEA says state policy should be guided by the following criteria:

- Items should be developed locally based on local objectives.
- Exercises should be diagnostic in nature.
- Exercises in subject areas should be developed and agreed on by teachers who teach those subjects.
- Objectives for instruction are clear to all—teachers, students, parents, administrators and the general public.
- Test items/exercises should be criterion-referenced.
- Students should have multiple opportunities over a period of years to be assessed in a variety of ways to correct deficiencies identified by assessment.
- Students should be informed of any deficiencies and should receive special help.
- Margin of error in the exercises should be taken into account in setting the minimums.
- States should provide technical assistance to develop local skills in assessing student needs, setting goals, developing programs and evaluating progress.

computation, compared with more than 50% of the other three. Six percent of the CTBS questions involved percentages, while two of the other tests had no percentage questions. Grouping was tested by the SAT, but not at all by the MAT or the CTBS.

Schools are penalized in two ways if an important part of the school curriculum is not emphasized in a test, says Andrew Porter, coordinator of the IRT project. "First, an area that is taught is not tested. Second, other topics will be given more emphasis in the test than they were in the curriculum of the school," he says.

Norms vs. Criteria

The problem of content validity is also a consideration in choosing norm-referenced or criterion-referenced tests. Norm-referenced tests are designed to discriminate between students, rather than to document that a student has mastered a specific skill. For example, the SAT is a norm-referenced test that discriminates between the students who are likely to succeed in college and those who are not.

By contrast, a criterion-referenced test contains objectives for each question. Each correct answer represents at least partial mastery of that particular objective. In a norm-referenced test, questions that all children know tend to be discarded, because they do not differentiate between students. In a criterion-referenced test, items are included based on the importance of the skill tested.

Although criterion-referenced tests have many supporters, Gene Glass at the U. of Colorado opposes them because of the need to arbitrarily set a minimum cut-off score. "The only standard that is safe and defensible is change over time," Glass says. Although he would prefer to avoid competency testing altogether, Glass, if forced to test, would choose a norm-referenced test that could identify system-wide faults. A test of basic skills items could be developed and given periodically to large groups of students. If fewer students answered a particular item correctly over time, it would signal the school that something is wrong, he explains.

Schools can use either norm- or criterion-referenced tests, according to Roy Forbes, director of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The important thing, he says, is that the test should match the curriculum and should be chosen carefully, with the input of the community. Forbes suggests a four-step process for selecting minimal competency tests. First, teachers, administrators, parents and citizens should determine what the community feels the schools should be teaching. Second, the curriculum should be examined to see how well it

matches the community's priorities. Third, changes in the curriculum should be planned where necessary. Fourth, a test should be selected that reflects the curriculum.

"I don't look at minimal competency as negative," Forbes says, if it can be used as an opportunity to "maximize involvement in reviewing curriculum." Such involvement fosters a feeling of ownership in the school. Conversely, "when one uses a small number of people to select a test to which a standard is tied, it reduces the ownership" felt by teachers, parents and the community, he says.

Test Errors and Secrecy

Critics have charged that standardized tests sometimes give credit for the wrong answer or are unfairly ambiguous. Another problem is that a bright student may be penalized by analyzing a question too deeply, thus reading something into a question that was not intended. Project TORQUE (Tests of Reasonable Quantitative Understanding of the Environment) asserts that "an atmosphere of military secrecy surrounds educational testing today. Parents have no access to the tests that play an important role in deciding their children's futures, and the public has few ways of judging whether or not it is being well served."

Responding to these charges, Forbes says test developers must "continuously be on guard against" errors and ambiguities. And, since "some of them will find their way into tests," he continues, "it is important to be willing to share data at the test item level." By letting outside groups examine questions under controlled conditions, he says, people "can make their own judgments about how good test items are."

Forbes adds that test errors are damaging only if the test results are used as the **single** criterion for a decision. "People should never use a test as the only measure," he concludes.

Cultural Bias

A major concern voiced by minority groups is that competency tests—like many other standardized tests—will be culturally biased. Such tests, the argument goes, are usually constructed by white, middle-class males and are thus weighted in favor of children from middle-class backgrounds. Frederico Pēna of the Chicano Education Project in Denver gives the example of a test which shows a coffee cup and asks where the coffee cup belongs. The correct answer—in a saucer—would be meaningless to many poor children, Peña says, because they have no saucers in their homes.

Traditionally, he says, tests are normed on middle income, rather than lower income, children. And even when test companies recognize the limitations, local school districts may be unaware of them. Peña says he noticed a warning in the California Achievement Test instructions that test results could be misinterpreted for minority children or those from different cultures. "I've found that school districts don't even read that," Peña says.

José Cárdenas, director of the Intercultural Development Research Assn., recommends using "people knowledgeable about cultural content" to screen test items for cultural relevance and language validity. As an added check, the test items should be given to a group of children. Questions that large numbers of children miss should be examined to see if the children missed them because they did not know the answer or because of test bias, he says.

Both Cárdenas and Peña think any minimal competency program should require accountability of schools and teachers as well as students. Cárdenas said he knows of schools where about 90% of the minority students drop out before the end of 12th grade. "I can't understand how a state accrediting mechanism can say that is an acceptable school system," Cárdenas says. On teacher accountability, he adds, "If a teacher has a long track record of not being able to teach children, I think that the certification of that teacher should be reviewed." Such a review might require the teacher to take additional courses or training to acquire the competencies that are missing, he explains.

"In other words, I reject completely the idea that the child has to be held accountable and the person who is supposed to have the skills and competencies, the abilities and experience for teaching children, should be dismissed so lightly," Cárdenas concludes.

Peña adds that the performance of schools might be tied in with state funding. In order to help children, the school should be required to test and "perform corrective surgery at an early age," he says. Also, the schools should give adequate notice to students and parents that the child is not succeeding.

Cárdenas says another mistake schools often make is to assume that an Hispanic child's problem in school is language related, when the problem instead could be perceptual, cultural or a combination of factors. The solution, according to Cárdenas, is to chart an individual educational plan for each "atypical" child, along the lines of the individualized education programs (IEPs) required for handicapped children.

"A fundamental problem in our educational system is that it is very much geared to 'typical' children," Cárdenas says. "Not only do handicapped children suffer, but all other atypical children—minority

children, language-different and gifted children—suffer from not being able to succeed up to their potential. Addressing educational programs to the typical or average student produces mediocrity in our schools," he adds.

Safeguards can be built into tests by asking three questions, adds Hermes Cervantes, psychologist with the Denver Public Schools:

- Are the questions appropriate to the community?
- Do the test questions cover information that has been covered in the curriculum?
- Is the test a valid predictor of success in later life?

On the first question, Cervantes notes that lower income children may not be exposed, for example, to the problem of balancing a checkbook, which puts them at a disadvantage with middle and upper income students. The issue of curriculum is a similar problem, he says, because children from a lower income school may not be exposed to the same curriculum, while the test questions are likely to be geared to the curriculum of the middle class schools.

Thirdly, Cervantes questions whether such tests actually correlate with success after school. "Those who succeed on the test—the average middle class student—would probably succeed with or without the test," he says. "It is the child at the lower end whom we are more concerned about. Is the remediation provided to help students pass the test going to correlate with their succeeding outside of school?"

Cervantes' question about test validity was put to Thomas Oliver, vice president of the American College Testing Program, which distributes the Adult Performance level (APL) test. The APL tests basic skills that are applied in practical life areas, like occupational knowledge, health, government, consumer education and community resources. Versions of the test are being used in several school districts and in a state testing program in New Mexico. Because the test is only one year old, there have been no longitudinal studies to correlate success on the test with success in life. "We do have clear evidence," Oliver adds, "from people tested in a national sample that those with higher incomes, more education and from a higher socioeconomic class score markedly better than those who are unemployed or on welfare."

What One School District Did About Test Bias

The APL test was given to high school juniors in Palm Beach County, Fla., in 1976. Slightly more than 8% of the white children

failed, but 56% of the minority children failed. When the results became known, the district formed a task force heavily weighted with minorities to determine what should be done to improve educational opportunities for minority students.

"When you examine the APL, there is no question that you have a bias" in favor of white, English-speaking Americans, says Gloria Kuchinskas, director of compensatory and developmental programs for Palm Beach County. "Because we are talking about functioning in American society, it is culturally fair in that respect," she says.

In response to the APL force recommendations, the school district revised its curriculum, set up Neighborhood Resource Centers with community tutors, "tightened up" on the curriculum materials that could be used in the district, and enacted a "very severe" nonattendance policy at the secondary level, Kuchinskas says.

Kuchinskas says minority residents in Palm Beach County are not opposed to the testing, because the district lets anyone interested take a trial APL test. "They almost universally agreed that kids should be able to do the items on the test," she says. "We let them see that it is truly minimal. All you need to do is be sure the test is reasonable."

Kuchinskas adds that the test and the review process have been quite beneficial to the district. Ironically, a number of very good students failed the test the first time because they had been in advanced math since the fifth grade and had not had percentages or consumer math.

"Even if minimal competency testing disappears tomorrow, it will have done our system a great deal of good because we've taken a good look at some things that we never really considered before," she says.

Legal Challenges to Testing

Not everyone agrees with Kuchinskas that such tests are culturally fair. The Florida NAACP threatened to halt the statewide minimal competency testing that will be required for graduates beginning with the class of 1979. The test was first administered in late 1977 and up to 78% of the students at predominantly black and Hispanic high schools failed the test.

"There were items on that test dealing with checkbooks and interest rates," NAACP State President Charles Cherry said. "The average black kid has no knowledge of that whatsoever, while the white kids are taught it at home."

In California, schools may face lawsuits over the issue of locally determined standards and tests. "What if a kid can't pass one test, but

can pass a neighboring district's test?" asks former Pasadena Supt. Ramon Cortines. "It's a lawyer's heyday."

Another potential problem is the possibility that the child may not have been taught the information. The curriculum covers the competencies, Cortines says, but what guarantee do we have that those skills are actually being taught in the classroom?

One legal safeguard that Pasadena is using is to inform the parents of all transferring and incoming students that passing a proficiency exam is a required part of the graduation criteria. "If parents are not notified in time, they can say the students were not adequately prepared," Cortines said.

Early Exit Exams

A few states are developing proficiency tests that would allow students to graduate from high school early. **California** and **Florida** have such tests now, and **Connecticut** is considering a combination of them. The California High School Proficiency Exam measures basic skills in reading and math plus the application of those skills in career and occupational development, consumer uses, social science and natural science. Students must be 16 years old in order to take it, and those who pass have the option of staying in school or receiving an equivalency diploma. According to Dale Carlson, assessment director for the California State Dept. of Education, the test was intended as a tool for reform. Schools that did not want to lose state aid would be encouraged to offer alternatives so that students who passed the test would stay in school.

Florida is using the General Education Development (GED) test on a two-year pilot basis. There is no minimum age for taking the test, but students are screened carefully because those who pass must leave school. According to Thomas Fisher, director of assessment for the Florida Dept. of Education, students must have written parental permission and have a career counseling session before the test, and a session to interpret the test results afterward. The Florida law also calls for subject area examinations that would permit students to test "out of" a given subject.

The Connecticut Board of Education has approved six recommendations to provide diploma alternatives for dropouts, college bound and work bound students, and out-of-school adults. According to Mark Potish, technical assistant with the State Dept. of Education, the new program is contingent on legislative approval of new regulations and new funding and approval from the American Council on Education for use of the GED.

If all contingencies are met, Connecticut students who have reached the age of 16 could receive a High School Equivalent Competency-Based Certificate by passing the GED and a custom designed, two-hour version of the Adult Performance Level (APL) test. Before the test, a student would receive counseling about alternatives and the student's future plans. The student who passes has to officially request a state equivalency diploma, so graduation would not be mandatory as it is in Florida with the GED test. Follow-up instruction is planned for those students who do not pass.

The Connecticut board also recommended that students be allowed to take the APL and have the results included as part of their official school record. According to Potish, this provision would benefit students who wanted to leave school but who did not pass the GED. Another recommendation calls for field testing of an external high school diploma similar to one developed by the U. of Texas Adult Performance Level Project. This program would be open to students and to out-of-school adults. Graduates of the external program would possess a comprehensive portfolio about the competencies the person has demonstrated, Potish says.

Examples of Demonstrating Competencies

Because many of the skills necessary for successful adulthood do not lend themselves to paper and pencil tests, a number of schools have incorporated competency demonstrations into their graduation requirements. **Craig City, Alaska,** is situated on an island and the school serves a wide area of rugged terrain. "Along with expected requirements in reading, writing and math," write Wayne Jennings and Joe Nathan in the *North Central Association Quarterly,* the graduates of Craig City High School must be able "to float for two minutes, perform mouth-to-mouth rescuscitation, read a marine chart and answer questions relating to directions, water depth, rock and reef identification, and aids to navigation."

Graduates of the **St. Paul (Minn.) Open School** are required to compile a packet describing how they have demonstrated required skills. According to Jennings and Nathan, skills must be demonstrated in consumer awareness, career awareness, learning in the community, current issues, cultural awareness (one's own and two other cultures), information finding, communication and personal/interpersonal skills (taking care of one's body and getting along with a group of people). In addition to the packet, the students must pass a math test and prepare a "clear, grammatically correct summary of their last three years of education," Jennings and Nathan write.

In a similar vein, the Prospect School in **North Bennington, Vt.,** evaluates its students by gathering samples of their work in a large file. According to the *New York Times,* the file contains student art projects, samples of written papers, notes by teachers and diaries by the teachers describing daily and weekly activities, like "Sharon helped two children construct a house out of blocks, arguing with Susan at one point about the size of a doorway." The nontraditional school serves children ages four to 13.

At the opposite end of the age spectrum are adults who receive diplomas through the **New York State** External High School Diploma Program. The diploma was developed as an alternative to the General Educational Development test, which many adults found irrelevant, says Ruth Nickse, director of the program for the Regional Learning Service (RLS) of Central New York.

Through three take-home tests and two oral interviews, adults demonstrate competencies by simulating actual situations, like shopping for a car, hunting for a job, or knowing the basics of family health care. The tests and interviews cover competencies in the following areas: communication; computation; self-awareness (decision-making, aesthetic expression, health and safety); social awareness; consumer awareness; scientific awareness and occupational preparedness. "The

Teaching to the Test

Two additional fears expressed by test critics are that teachers will begin "teaching to the test" and that the curriculum will be shaped by test content. Under the right conditions, these effects can be positive. In Denver recently, the faculty at one high school became alarmed at the low spelling scores of their students and decided to do something about it, says Allan Hosler, supervisor of testing. For the whole year, teachers in every subject gave their students 10 spelling words each week. "At the end of the year, spelling scores jumped up," Hosler adds. In this case, "teaching to the test" did not result in narrowing the curriculum or meaningless drill. Instead, it simply meant that teachers focused more attention on a skill students—as a group—were not acquiring.

Denver's tests also are useful for instructing individual students. One month after the Proficiency and Review Test, the English and math teachers receive computer printouts for each student, spelling out strengths and weaknesses on each of the skills tested. The printout lists the number of questions, the number the student answered correctly and the "degree of competency," indicating that the student passed, failed or needs review on that particular skill.

New York program is not instructional," Nickse says. "Those who don't have the skills are told to get a tutor," who can be a neighbor, the local librarian or a paid helper.

After the adults master the "generalized competencies," they are required to demonstrate an "individualized competency" in a vocational, academic or specialized area. The vocational requirement can be satisfied either by a letter from the person's employer or through completion of a performance test. Local workers and employers have developed performance tests in such areas as basic meat cutting, bookkeeping, television repair, restaurant management, home management, modeling and licensed practical nursing. Those adults who wish to continue in postsecondary studies can fulfill the academic requirement either through standardized test scores or through a portfolio of their work. Individualized competencies can also be certified in artistic, organizational, political or economic skills.

Writing Samples

The **Jefferson County (Colo.) Public Schools** have developed an elaborate system for measuring student writing ability that yields helpful information both for the individual student and for the school as a whole. About 90 days into the school year, students in grades three, five, seven, nine and 11 are asked to write compositions within a time limit. The students are shown a photograph and asked to write a description or a story about the activity shown in the photograph. They are allowed to use a dictionary or thesaurus, and are encouraged to use their imagination in writing the paper.

The papers are scored by trained graders who use criteria developed by a team of teachers from the grade level being assessed. The criteria for the third grade, for example, is developed by third-grade teachers who read a sample of 200 essays. From the sample, the teachers develop a matrix that describes four ability levels for such skills as style and vocabulary, sentence structure, ideas and spelling.

The paper is read by two graders who each give the student a grade of one, two, three or four. The scores are added together for the child's grade:

- 7-8—High competency;
- 5-6—Grade level competency;
- 3-4—Below grade level competency;
- 2 —Needs intensive help.

The samples are returned to the teachers about two months after the test. Along with the compositions is a workbook with suggestions about how to use the writing samples. Cary Stitt, Jefferson County language arts resource specialist, says the instructional suggestions vary each year based on ideas suggested by teachers and on the results of the writing samples themselves.

The 1976 third grade workbook suggests selecting sentences from student papers and asking the students to analyze them for mechanics, structure or spelling. It also suggests reading compositions aloud, calling attention to good points, like "fine descriptive words and phrases, organization, imagination and use of dialogue."

The workbook also encourages sharing the writing sample results with the individual student and parent. "It is important for the student to see that he or she is making progress," Stitt says. "They may need work on mechanics, but see that their ideas are strong. Also, research has shown that self-evaluation is very beneficial for improvement in writing," Stitt explains.

In addition to individual scores, the school receives a computer printout giving the percentages of students who score in the four categories. If a large proportion of the students fall into a particular category, the staff can look at a sample paper and determine which skills need extra attention.

Stitt sees two main benefits to the writing sample. "It provides teachers with an outside view of their students" papers and the criteria gives the district a check on its program," he says.

Evaluation Principles

Whether competencies are measured through practical demonstrations, written tests or oral interviews, it is important that the evaluation procedure be fair and dependable. Writing in the *Journal of Home Economics*, Ruth Hughes and Alyce Fanslow describe four characteristics that are important to an evaluation:

- Content validity,
- Objectivity,
- Reliability,
- Usability.

"Content validity represents the degree to which the evaluative device actually assesses the competency," they write. Obviously, this is a judgment that must be made by the person in charge of the program. The writers add that the importance of the competency will determine the number of items in the device and the weight attached to each.

Objectivity is "the degree to which a scorer is able to rate participants solely on the basis of their performance, without reference to the scorer's personal or subjective opinions," Hughes and Fanslow explain. If the competency test involves observation, it is helpful to describe the expected behavior as specifically as possible.

Reliability of an instrument is established when scores "tend to repeat themselves and produce consistent results," they write. On standardized achievement tests, reliability coefficients of 0.9 are required, while coefficients of 0.85 and above are "generally accepted" for observation devices.

Usability relates to the practicality of the assessment device. Considerations include whether the device is suitable for the persons to be assessed, whether information is available on content validity and reliability, and the conditions that are necessary for conducting the assessment.

Chapter 3.

Local Districts: Competency Pioneers

Although much of the attention on competencies has been focused on the states, most of the action is taking place in local school districts. In an *Education U.S.A.* survey of school administrators, 90% of the respondents indicated there is an interest in back-to-basics or competency-based education in their communities. Of the 160 respondents, many said the interest has already affected the curriculum. Among the changes mentioned were lower enrollment in electives, more remedial and secondary reading classes, more testing, fewer field trips and the "virtual elimination of mini-courses."

About one third reported a shift to more "no nonsense" teaching, including stricter grading and more homework, drill and memorization. One respondent noted that teachers are demanding "more critical thinking" from their students. The effect on teacher morale has been mixed; although one-third of the schools reported a change, 31 of the districts said the changes have improved morale, while 22 said morale has declined.

The morale problems take two forms: some teachers are apprehensive about the accountability aspects of requiring student competencies, and others are frustrated that a new rigidity in the classroom will stifle teacher creativity and initiative. Schools with improved morale reflect an attitude expressed by James Akers, superintendent in Madison, Kan. "I think [the interest in basics] has had a positive effect on morale, as teachers see themselves in a more productive role, working for definite results." He added that there is "more respect for teaching than a few years ago."

Although less than half the districts reported changes in curriculum, teaching methods and morale, many of the others said it was "too soon to tell" what effect the competency movement would have. Others, especially small districts, commented that they had made no changes because "we never left the basics."

There were some interesting contradictions in the responses. The Aurora, Ill., Public Schools reported they have "just about eliminated

individualized instruction." In Jacksonville, Fla., however, St. Paul's By the Sea parochial school uses an individualized, nongraded approach to teaching the basics. Many of the schools emphasized a return to traditional teaching methods, suggesting a rejection of team teaching and other innovations. But the Navajo Methodist Mission School in Farmington, N.M., has increased team teaching, "partially in response to increased awareness of the need to insure competence in the 3 Rs," according to Principal Morris Floyd.

The responses on fundamental schools were also contradictory. Although interest in some areas remains high, others reported that interest is declining and that some fundamental schools may close. Robert Olcese, superintendent of the Ridgeland Public Schools in Oak Lawn, Ill., captured the mood of many with his comment, "All our elementary schools are fundamental schools. That's what 'elementary' means."

The diverse and sometimes contradictory responses to the survey illustrate the complexity of the competency issue. Influenced by different factors and local values, school districts are responding to the competency movement in a variety of ways. Because many of the innovators can serve as useful models to other school districts, a number of case studies follow that describe how each has met the competency challenge.

Omaha, Neb: Westside Schools

The Westside Community Schools in Omaha, Neb., require graduates to demonstrate competency in seven areas: reading, mathematics, written communication, oral communication, consumerism, the democratic process and problem solving. Students are given several opportunities to pass the test and may enroll in remedial courses before retaking them.

The impetus for developing competencies came from teachers and administrators at Westside High School who were serving on a long-range planning committee. According to Asst. Principal Jim Findley, the committee developed 11 competencies which were reviewed by parents, students and other teachers. Four of the 11 were rejected—career education, leisure time, listening, and human and personal development—primarily because the reviewers could not agree on how to measure them.

The district began testing for the other seven competencies in 1974-75, and passing the tests became mandatory for 1977 graduates. The tests are given to students during the 9th, 10th and 11th grades. One of the seven is a commercial test that measures vocabulary and reading

comprehension. The other tests were developed by the Westside staff, with some assistance from citizens in the community.

The **written communication test** requires students to write three paragraphs on a topic of their choice. The papers are judged both on mechanics and the ability to present an idea. The **oral communication test,** which is given by the homeroom advisor, requires students to present an idea orally to a group. A handbook for advisors explains that the presentation does not have to be a formal speech, but the student must demonstrate an ability to organize main points, speak clearly and answer questions from the group.

The **mathematics test** measures computation, geometry, measurement, money problems and reading graphs and maps, among other things. The test is given first in ninth grade as a diagnostic tool and again during the junior year. The **democratic process test** is given to students enrolled in U.S. history classes. The true-false test measures a student's knowledge of the functions of local, state and federal governments, the provisions of the U.S. Constitution and understanding of the political process.

The **problem-solving test** is also given as part of the U.S. history course. In this exam, students are given an outline and are asked to pick a problem, like the industrial pollution of the Missouri River, for example. The student must state an hypothesis, find questions relevant to the problem, collect information about the problem and form conclusions about ways to solve it.

In preparation for the **consumer test,** students are given a handbook with chapters on money management, credit, insurance, taxes, comparison shopping and consumer protection. Students may either study the handbook or enroll in a consumer education class.

Westside Supt. H. Vaughn Phelps says the competency requirements have been "well received by teachers and parents and quite well received by students." In fact, he says, the district now has a committee that is studying whether to expand the requirements. Phelps personally favors adding a health requirement, like stipulating that a student should be within 10 pounds of normal weight in order to qualify for a diploma.

Berea, Ohio

New graduation requirements in the Berea (Ohio) City School District will become mandatory for the graduating class of 1980. Students must pass the Adult Performance Level (APL) test, which measures reading, writing, computation, problem-solving and listening as applied in five knowledge areas: community resources, occupational

Westside Community Schools

SAMPLE QUESTIONS . . .

Listed are five questions from the Math, Consumerism, and Democratic Process Minimum Competency Tests.

Math

A stadium seats 24,300 persons. Attendance showed sales of 2,538 student tickets, 8,208 general admission tickets, and 7,248 reserved seats. How many seats were left empty?

Express 7/5 as a decimal.

Consumerism

A Brand of canned peaches is available in different sizes and prices. Which one is the best bargain?

a. 6 oz. at 36¢
b. 8 oz. at 42¢
c. 12 oz. at 56¢
d. 24 oz. at $1.20
e. none of the above

Democratic Process

True or False. In a "democracy" you would expect to find:

_____ The Senator from Nebraska is fired by the Governor.

_____ The City Council sets aside an industrial site for an industrial park.

knowledge, consumer economics, health and government/law.

The APL is only one part of a four-pronged Minimum Competencies Assurance Program that was recommended to the district by a competencies commission composed of students, parents and school professional staff. The program begins testing in the eighth grade to identify students in need of remedial help.

Eighth graders take a High School Reading Proficiency Exam and a High School Mathematics Proficiency Exam. In tenth grade, students take an APL survey, which is a shortened form of the APL test. Eleventh graders take the full exam. After each test, students are divided into three categories: fully proficient, marginal and those in need of intensive remedial help.

Efforts are made to bring the low-scoring and marginal students together with their parents, teachers and counselor to plan corrective action. In the 1977-78 school year the district piloted different ways of working with the students. According to Asst. Supt. Dean Kelly, test results are given to all students and notes are mailed to the parents of students who score below an acceptable level. Although the cut-off scores vary on the four tests, 70% is generally viewed as the minimum score for proficient students and 60% is the minimum for marginal students. Beginning in 1980, 70% will be the minimum passing score on the APL test.

Remedial classes are being offered to eighth, ninth and tenth graders who had low scores. The students in the marginal category are being helped less formally. Some are being tutored; some receive extra help in regular classes. "One of the real values of the program," says Kelly, "is that we really focus on students' needs."

As part of the program, the district has scheduled inservice training programs where teachers get together and exchange information about teaching techniques that are effective and ineffective. Discussion meetings have also been held to allow junior and senior high school teachers to exchange information. "Pupil record cards have a tendency to be very mechanistic," Kelly says. Through the discussion meetings, the district is trying to make those records more humanistic.

The district's competencies commission selected the four test instruments after examining 71 tests over a two-year period. The commission compared test objectives with the "broad expectancies" they had established, Kelly says. The eighth-grade reading test was developed by school staff from a bank of test items developed for the SCORE Project of Westinghouse Learning Corp. The test items and objectives are now available through Houghton-Mifflin Co. (See p. 95). The district developed its math test from a variety of sources. It purchases the APL survey and full APL test from the American College Testing Program.

In addition to testing, staff development and remediation, the competencies commission recommended that a task force be formed to study the feasibility of multiple diplomas. Suggested alternatives are an academic or honors diploma, a vocational diploma, a regular diploma or a certificate of attendance.

Medford, Oregon

Oregon's much-publicized competency-based education program is broader than measuring competencies. It entails a planning process that involves members of the community in setting goals and objectives for the schools. The competencies required for graduation are a narrow band of minimums which are related to, but separate from, the broader goals.

The Medford (Ore.) Public Schools began piloting the new program in 1974. The components of the Medford system are:

- District Aims: 11 broad goals of education.
- Scope and Sequence: a master plan describing objectives that children should be able to master at each grade level.
- Planned Course Statement: a form describing how a certain course will be taught at a given school.
- Lesson Plans: the individual teacher's plans for teaching the course.

When the Medford system is fully operational, student achievement will be measured in four ways:

- Standardized tests
- Grades in class
- Developmental scales
- Competencies

According to Glenn Hogen, director of instruction, the standardized test is used to establish a "baseline" with which to compare the other measures. The developmental scale contains concepts and tasks that the average child should be able to do at a given grade level. The scale for sixth grade communication includes these tasks:

Student exhibits listening courtesy and gives evidence of having listened; extends use of verbal and non-verbal communication; expresses self by writing legibly a simple paragraph with a topic sentence and supporting sentences using correct spelling; understands fact and fantasy in literature and other media; applies decoding and encoding skills; recognizes vocabulary in content areas; appropriate to 6.0 level, reads silently and orally with comprehension; compares a variety of information sources, notes details and summarizes; knows the role of communication in careers.

Developmental scales are written for half-year intervals; there are scales for grades 3.0 and 3.5, for example. A child who can do a majority of the things described is considered at grade level.

The developmental scales were written by teachers to provide a common language between terms used in the scope and sequence and the planned course statements. Performance objectives in the scope and sequence typically say "the child shall be able to demonstrate a certain skill," Hogen says. When a sample of teachers was asked to describe what was meant by "demonstrate", however, the district found a disturbing variety of answers.

Teachers use the developmental scales twice a year. The scales, together with grades in class and standardized test scores, provide a triple check on student achievement. For example, a sixth grade student may score 6.5 on a standardized test, make Bs and Cs, but rank only at grade 4.0 on the developmental scale. The scale serves as a "yellow flag" that the child is not competent in some areas, Hogen says. The next step would be individual testing to pinpoint the problem.

The fourth measure—competency—is used to evaluate students in the upper grades. While some Oregon school districts developed more than 100 competencies, Medford wrote 23 broadly defined competencies. Along with the competency statements are performance indicators and courses where the competency may be checked. Hogen says the district hopes eventually to certify students as competent whenever they are ready, instead of waiting for specific courses. Since the class of 1978 is required to pass certain competencies, specific courses were included to ensure that all students have an opportunity to satisfy the requirements.

Southeast Free School

The Southeast Free School of Minneapolis, Minn., is a non-graded alternative school for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. The

secondary students at Southeast qualify to graduate by demonstrating proficiencies in five core areas and two additional subjects. No course credits are required. Instead, the student must compile a file that documents competence to the satisfaction of a personal graduation committee.

Competencies are required in communication/language arts; math; social perspective/humanities (including history, social studies and cultural awareness); science and personal independence; and initiative. According to Principal Maurice Britt, there are lists of skills and performance indicators that students must meet, either by pencil and paper tests or by demonstration. Some students demonstrate communication skills by serving on the Southeast School Board. Others may demonstrate personal independence or initiative in an internship in the community.

Students must demonstrate additional proficiencies in two subjects, which may be two of the five areas or any skill that is listed in the U.S. Department of Labor's directory of Occupational Titles, Britt says. Criteria for satisfying these proficiencies are worked out between the student and a teacher of a relevant subject. One student qualified for a music proficiency by giving a performance. Another student qualified for a proficiency in poetry by having a poem published in a Minneapolis newspaper.

Because the school is small (110 secondary students), some of the specialized courses must be obtained outside the school. Britt says several students have attended courses at the nearby U. of Minneapolis. Students may also attend vocational courses at other Minneapolis schools. One Southeast student earned proficiency in jewelry-making through courses at a secondary career center. Students must also satisfy course credit requirements for any subjects taken at another school.

Each secondary student has an adviser with whom the student has regular contact. At the beginning of the senior year, the student meets with the adviser and forms a graduation committee composed of two members of the Southeast staff, another student, one parent, an out-of-school adult and the adviser. The committee reviews the student's record and advises the student about which proficiencies are lacking. At the end of the year, the committee meets again to see that all the requirements have been met. Students can take proficiency tests as many times as is necessary. "We do not fail students," Britt says.

He concedes that the school is not for everyone. Students are interviewed prior to admission. The staff is looking for students who want to take responsibility for their own learning. This can include "highly unmotivated students who will take off" when their horizons are broadened, he says. Britt adds that the Southeast program is very

demanding on the faculty. Teachers must design most of the proficiency tests and they must write several versions to accommodate students who do not pass the first one. In addition, every faculty member, including the principal, serves as an adviser to several students.

Jefferson County, Colo., Schools

Jefferson County, an 80,000-pupil district west of Denver, has developed a criterion-referenced record-keeping system for documenting competencies. Printed record cards are prepared for each student in reading, language arts and math. The card follows the child through elementary and junior high school, showing each teacher which skills the child has mastered. When a skill is introduced, a mark is made on the card. In reading and language arts, the space opposite the skill is punched out once the skill is mastered. In math, a different mark indicates mastery.

The purpose of all three systems is to provide continuity of instruction from year to year. Although teachers are free to choose from a variety of approved textbooks, the record cards ensure that the same concepts and skills will be emphasized throughout the district. With the record cards, a teacher cannot erroneously assume a child has mastered a certain skill because of the grade level the child attends. The teacher knows the skill must be reinforced if mastery is not indicated on the card.

The reading program in Jefferson County, called Wisconsin Design, was developed by the U. of Wisconsin. It was adopted by the district to give uniform objectives in word attack (phonics), comprehension and study skills. "Before Wisconsin Design," says Eleanor Odden, reading coordinator for Jefferson County, "each school had its own reading program." Now, each school has a choice of basal reading series, but the schools are expected to cover the same objectives. A number of Jefferson County teachers were hired to write teacher guides with strategies for teaching the objectives. The guides are contained in loose leaf notebooks so teachers can personalize them with their own materials.

The district is piloting a similar program in secondary schools called Design II. Developed by National Computer Services, Design II covers word attack, study skills and reading comprehension, and is designed for the secondary student who is reading below grade level. Secondary schools that are not using the Design II program offer traditional remedial courses and a functional reading class that teaches "survival" reading skills.

The math program is called STAMM, which stands for Systematic Teaching and Measuring Mathematics. It was developed by the Jefferson County staff and is now part of the U.S. Office of Education National Diffusion Network. STAMM skills are grouped under 12 categories, including computation, consumer math, geometry and measurement. Skills in each category are introduced, developed and maintained. The district uses what it calls the "spiral" approach, meaning skills need not be mastered the same year they are introduced. Instead, the reinforcement of skills "spirals" through the system. STAMM incorporates kindergarten through the eighth grade math classes and several high school math courses.

At the end of the eighth grade, students are tested on 39 competencies. According to math specialist Larry Bradsby, there are three test items for each objective and students must answer two out of three correctly to demonstrate mastery. A printout lists the competencies, and a student who lacks too many of them is scheduled for a remedial class. Others work on the remaining competencies in their regular classes.

In the five years the district has been using STAMM, student scores on standardized tests have risen significantly. According to Bradsby, approximately 50% of the fourth, sixth and eighth graders scored above national norms on tests given in 1972-73. Now, about 70% are above national norms.

In language arts, competencies are documented in written communication in four categories: mechanics, structure, spelling and practical applications. Some of the practical skills are writing letters, summaries, directions, newspaper articles and definitions. A punch card is being piloted in oral communication with subskills in speaking, listening and nonverbal communication.

The language arts card also contains space to record the child's writing sample score. (See Chapter 2 for a description of this test.) On the reverse side, space is provided for teachers to indicate the introduction of concepts whose mastery cannot be measured. Included in this list are handwriting skills, original prose and poetry and such units as biography, television, mythology and propaganda.

In all three systems, the cards contain symbols to indicate at which grade level each skill should be introduced. The symbols are letters, with "A" representing kindergarten and "G," the sixth grade. Letters are used instead of grade levels to avoid stigma for a fourth grader, for example, who has not mastered a "third grade" skill.

"The ideal [in Wisconsin Design] is for a child to get through sixth grade with all the holes punched," says Pat Benyshek, Kullerstrand Elementary reading teacher. "The junior high picks up those students" who haven't mastered all the skills. The competencies can be verified

through teacher observation or on tests. In reading and language arts, the mastery level is 80%, in math, 75%, she says.

In addition to information about individual students, the record cards provide a resource for program evaluation. According to testing coordinator Harold Hoyt, "scannable forms" are sent to each school with each child's name and the child's skill levels from the previous year. A teacher or aide enters the child's current level and the computer prepares a matrix that indicates the amount of progress the child has made by grade level within schools. "The child may be making more progress in word attack than in comprehension," Hoyt explains. "It gives the program coordinators and the principals a feel for what is going on in the schools." Reports are printed by grade level rather than by individual classroom, so teachers do not get singled out.

One positive aspect of the record cards is that they allow teachers to grade students according to individual ability levels, rather than grade level expectations. "In this system," says Phyllis Gibbons, language arts teacher at Kullerstrand, "the bright, lazy kid may get an unsatisfactory grade, while the diligent, slow one may get good marks."

These programs require considerable individualization by teachers because the cards pinpoint the proficiency of each child on a multitude of skills. (The language arts card contains 111 skills.) "At first, teachers got hung up on the mechanics," says Benyshek. "They felt there was too much secretarial work." The district resolved this problem by providing aides. Benyshek, for example, has the help of an aide for two hours each day.

Pasadena, Calif.

The Pasadena (Calif.) Unified School District is developing a sequential course of study of "minimum essentials" in English and mathematics for the seventh through the twelfth grades. Using objectives determined by the minimum essentials curriculum, Pasadena teachers have developed proficiency tests in reading, writing and math that satisfy the requirements of California's minimum competency law.

The Hart Law, AB 3408, requires local school districts to set proficiency standards in reading comprehension, writing and computational skills. Beginning in 1980, students will have to pass proficiency tests in these areas in order to graduate. As an "early warning," the Hart Law also requires districts to test students once between grades seven and nine and twice between grades ten and eleven.

Pasadena sophomores took the minimum competency test for the first time in February, 1978. Those who did not pass have four more

opportunities to do so during their junior and senior years. The math test covers whole numbers, fractions, mixed numbers, decimals and percentages, with applications based on common uses of the skills. The objective portion of the English test contains questions in reading comprehension, spelling, paragraph organization, fragments and run-on sentences, commas, apostrophes, capitalization, usage, verb forms and correct modifiers.

The test also contains a writing sample with three topics from which students choose one assignment. Because the essays must be hand graded, only those of marginal students are evaluated. For now, the district is working with a rough range of 65 to 80 as the cut-off score for evaluating the writing sample. Those with scores below 65 would fail the English portion, and those with scores above 80 would automatically pass without the need for a writing sample grade. Those parameters however, are "not in concrete."

In addition to the proficiency tests, Pasadena has minimum essential textbooks that go beyond the basic proficiencies. The Minimum Essentials in English program was developed over a two-year period with assistance from more than 100 English teachers. Programs for each grade level are bound as booklets containing lessons and exercises on composition and language. The program is intended as a "floor" of skills; it is not the entire curriculum.

The district developed its own textbooks because it felt commercial textbooks did not offer sufficient exercises on given subjects. Teachers are free to use commercial texts that cover the same goals and objectives as the minimum essentials program, but because they were involved in developing the district program they have an "investment" in it, former Supt. Ramon Cortines explains.

Lessons emphasize the practical uses of skills and are geared to the interest of students. For example, eighth grade lessons on topic sentences "avoid exercise paragraphs about sugar beet production in Tierra del Fuego and are concerned instead with friends, movies, television commercials or teen-age problems," the district says.

The district's Minimum Essentials in Math program was begun about eight years ago under a federal grant, and booklets similar to those in the English program have been developed with exercises on the math objectives. Pasadena will sell the student booklets and teacher guides to other interested school districts. The math and English books are complete for grades seven through ten, and the portions for grades 11 through 12 will be ready soon. (See Selected Resources, p. 96 for ordering information.)

Chapter 4.

Communicating Competencies

A comprehensive communication plan should be an integral part of any minimal competency program. Communication geared to each group affected by such a program can lessen anxiety for students and parents and can foster cooperation from the entire school staff.

Florida Functional Literacy Test

The communication plan for the Florida Functional Literacy Test provides a timely and successful example of how one state education department handled the launching of a minimal competency program. Beginning in 1979, Florida seniors will have to pass the Functional Literacy Test in order to graduate. The test is divided into communication and math sections and measures "survival" skills, like the ability to read a road map. It was given to high school juniors for the first time in the fall of 1977. More than 40,000 of the 11th graders failed one or both sections of the test, but they will have two more opportunities to pass it over the next year.

Communication about the Functional Literacy Test began in the summer of 1977 with the teachers who would be most affected by the tests. Assessment staff trained in speech communication visited schools around the state to explain the test to 11th grade teachers. The verbal presentation was augmented with pamphlets explaining the program. At about the same time, a special meeting was planned for the school public information specialists. These specialists were told that the districts would be notified in advance about the date their test results would be available.

Next, State Comr. of Education Ralph Turlington gave a two-hour briefing about the test to the Florida news media. "People in education knew about the test," but the general public was generally unaware of it at this point, says Howard Friedman, executive assistant to the commissioner for public information.

After this general briefing, Friedman, Turlington and Thomas Fisher, the state's director of assessment, traveled to major cities in the state to hold conferences for newspaper education writers and broadcast reporters. Giving these writers an in-depth knowledge of the test stimulated interest and helped prepare the public for the test, which was then just three weeks away.

On testing day, "we made all the major TV networks because we were the first state to give a minimal competency test," Friedman explains. The state spent about two months scoring the exams, and the next step for the education department was to prepare the public for the results. Although the test items are kept secret, Friedman convinced the assessment staff to allow a select group of reporters to see the questions. "If the test is defensible and valid, we ought not to be afraid to let them see it," he says.

With the help of school district public information officers, Friedman identified the education writers in the state. All 50 were invited to a one and one-half day conference, and 38 came. During the telephone invitation, the reporters were told they would be free to report anything that happened during the conference except the specific content of test questions and answers. All agreed to those conditions.

The conference began with an informal introduction of the testing program at Friedman's house. The next day, the Functional Literacy Test and the entire state assessment program were explained, after which the reporters themselves took the test. "We sat them in every other seat, just like we do with the students." Thirty-seven took the test while the remaining reporter filmed them. "It was a media event," Friedman says.

There was a question-and-answer period while the tests were scored and then each reporter's test was returned. One writer got 100% correct and one flunked. "Every one of them wrote stories and the one who flunked admitted it, in print. The media coverage was fantastic, because it told people how easy the test was," Friedman says.

The media conference had two big benefits. It was the first time the education writers had ever gotten together, so the conference provided an opportunity for the writers to make contacts with their colleagues.

The second big plus was that their coverage gave the test credibility. "Most said, 'If my kids can't pass this, I'd be ashamed of them.'" Friedman says. Also, when students complained that the test was too easy, too hard or too culturally biased, the reporters had direct knowledge of the test questions and could dispute the claims.

"If the media says that something the government is doing is okay, it gives it credibility, because the media is generally considered to be

critical of government," Friedman notes. "We have not had a single adverse editorial."

The test results were released over several weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas of 1977. Friedman alerted each superintendent by telephone when their results would arrive. Statewide, 37% of the students failed one or both parts of the test. Although the failure rates were high, "every superintendent reacted affirmatively," Friedman says. The administrators took the attitude that the test uncovered areas that schools needed to work on.

Test scores for districts, schools and classrooms are part of the public record in Florida, and Friedman says there was "a lot of competition" among reporters to report district scores. The newspapers prepared the inevitable comparisons of districts and individual schools, but the stories attempted to probe the reasons for the differences, he says.

The test scores were reported to individual students, and their teachers received a profile indicating which skills the students missed. To make the scores more meaningful to teachers, the assessment staff developed a set of sample questions representative of the types of questions on the test. The sample test and the answers were also sent to the media and "half a dozen papers ran the test in full. The *Miami Herald* ran four full pages of test questions on a Wednesday and reported the answers the next Sunday," Friedman says.

During the three months following the test, Friedman estimates there were "more stories about education (in Florida) than at any other (comparable) time in 30 years." The state legislature appropriated $10 million for 1977-78 and $26.5 million in 1978-79 for remediation. Schools are required to give special help to any student who flunks the test. When fully operational, the test will be given each October and May to juniors and seniors, so students will have four chances to pass.

"We think that following the basic rule of obtaining public understanding is what we did right," Friedman says. "It's not magic or tricky or hard. It's just letting everybody in on what we're doing."

Berea, Ohio

The Berea (Ohio) City Schools Competencies Commission recommended that school staff be assigned to plan and design a "specific communication plan related to all facets" of the district's Minimum Competencies Assurance Program. The communication activities began while the commission was still meeting, with articles in the district newsletter and an annual report on the competency study. Once the competency program was approved by the school board, a number of parent programs were scheduled at schools in the district. According to

Supt. J. R. Andrisek, the meetings described the purpose of the minimum competencies program, the nature of the test to be given and the changes in graduation requirements. Parents were told that students would be given reading and math tests in the eighth and ninth grades, the APL survey in the tenth grade and the full APL in the eleventh grade. Beginning in 1980, students must be able to pass all five parts of the APL in order to graduate, parents found out.

Because Berea was the first major school district in Ohio to begin a minimum competency program, there was "a substantial amount of press coverage," Andrisek says. The program received an added boost when he was invited by Rep. Ronald Mottl, D-Ohio, to testify before a congressional committee looking at testing.

Testing began in the fall of 1977, and distribution of the test results was left up to each individual school. At Middleburg Heights Junior High, students were briefed on the English proficiency test by their English teachers a day or two before the test. The teachers explained what the test was, why the school was giving it, the ramifications of it and the tests students would face in the future, says Alan Feikle, counselor at the school.

When the scores came back, they were given to students with their progress report, which is a mini-conference with the teacher on the student's progress in that class. The student was given a written profile of the results which they were asked to have parents sign and return. According to Feikle, the test results came back with detailed information about student performance in vocabulary, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension and study skills. The profile for parents simplified this information to a grid which indicated whether the student had a "severe problem," a "problem" or "no problem" in each of the four areas.

To make the grid more meaningful to parents, the profile included examples of the skills. Two of the literal comprehension skills mentioned were "identifying main ideas and understanding details." A cover letter accompanying the profile explained that remedial programs were being planned, and encouraged parents with questions to call a counselor or the child's teacher. A similar letter was sent with the math results.

At Berea High School, letters were sent to parents of 10th graders who failed the APL survey. For those who were "close to passing," the district offered the opportunity to register for remedial programs. For students whose scores were well below passing, the district advised that they were recommending the remedial program for those students. Parents were given an opportunity to refuse the remedial program for their child by signing and returning the form.

Berea High School

January 24, 1978

Dear Parents:

On _____ the Berea Board of Education passed a resolution which requires that members of the graduating Class of 1980 pass a competency examination as a part of the requirements for graduation.

A preliminary examination was given to all sophomores of the Berea City School District during the week of _____ in October, 1977. Your son/daughter scored below the seventy percent required to pass the examination. His/her overall score was _____%. The areas of deficiency are checked below:

_____Community Resources	_____Identification
_____Occupational Knowledge	_____Reading
_____Health	_____Writing
_____Government and Law	_____Computation
_____Consumer Economics	_____Problem Solving

We are recommending that for the 1978-79 school year, your child be placed in a CORE program which will focus on basic skills. The areas of concentration will be reading, math, social studies and science, depending on your child's areas of deficiency. He can be scheduled into one or more parts of the CORE program.

If you have any questions concerning this important matter, please call me at 234-5418.

If you prefer to NOT have your child scheduled for the CORE program, please sign this form and return it to Mr. Minich, Berea High School, 165 E. Bagley Road, Berea, OH 44017

Sincerely,

_____

I DO NOT WANT MY CHILD IN THE CORE PROGRAM FOR 1978-79.

_____ _____

Signature Date

Springfield, Ore.

An early step in the Springfield, Ore., communication plan was an article in an internal school district publication explaining the competencies program to the staff. As in Ohio, the communication program was developed separately by the two high schools in the district.

Beginning with the class of 1978, Springfield graduates have to master certain competencies as well as satisfy course credit and attendance requirements. According to the district magazine, *What's Going on Here*, Springfield High School students will spend part of the first week of each school year attending small group orientation sessions devoted to the new requirements. Students will have one teacher/adviser for the three years of high school. The adviser will help the student plan and monitor the number of credits earned and the competencies satisfied.

The new requirements are explained jointly to students and parents at "parent nights" held at the school. Also, parents are notified by mail of individual student competency and credit deficiencies. A list of students deficient in requirements is provided to Springfield teachers. Students are encouraged to enroll in a resource period that is specific to the deficiency area. Other options for students are competency review sessions offered outside of regular school hours and individual learning packages that are developed for a student's particular problem.

A key part of the plan for Thurston High School was home visitations, conducted by school counselors. During the summer of 1977, counselors visited about 60 families of students who lacked at least five competencies and six course credits as they began their senior year. The Thurston "guide" program pairs students with staff members. The teachers meet at least once a month with students in their guide group. Parents were invited to meet their student's "guide" at a get-together early in the school year. Students who lack competencies in language arts and math may attend several review sessions, followed by a retest.

Westside Schools, Omaha, Neb.

Communication programs in the Westside School District in Omaha, Neb., serve two purposes: to inform the community of the district's seven competency tests and to highlight the priority of basic skills in the overall program. When the district decided to require competency tests for high school graduation, then communication director Gary Marx identified five questions the community would want answered:

- What are the minimum competencies?
- How were they developed?
- What kind of an instrument will be used to measure the competencies?
- What is the schedule of the tests?
- What happens to students who don't meet the competencies?

Marx prepared a two-page special report with a short description of each test, a schedule of the tests, sample test questions and a question-and-answer column. Readers were referred to the high school principal and assistant principal for further information.

Marx interviewed Jim Findley, assistant principal at Westside High, and sent excerpts to all radio stations as public service announcements. Marx gave a short introduction, which was followed by Findley's comments about the competency program. The spots closed ". . . and that's what's happening in the Westside Schools."

Short explanations about the competency program were included on one panel of a "fact" card and on one month's page of a yearly activity calendar published by the district. The program was also described through interviews on all three Omaha television stations. When the first class using the competency program graduated in 1977, Marx did a follow-up story on the number of students who didn't graduate.

On the more general theme of back-to-basics, Westside conducted a year-long campaign during 1975-76, highlighting the many basic skills programs in the district. Communication materials included a slide presentation on each basic program and brochures and references to the basics in newsletters and news releases. Reporters were asked to do the problems and take the tests as a basis for feature stories. For feedback, each teacher and building administrator made one call a week to a parent to ask how things were going.

The theme for Westside's Education Week in the fall of 1976 was "Johnny Can, Jane Can." Children were asked to write letters to their parents about what they were doing in math. The letters, which also illustrated student writing ability, were enlarged for display boards in a local shopping center. A sample competency test was developed with a composite of questions from the high school tests. More than 800 copies were printed, along with the answers, so shoppers could grade themselves. "We decided to emphasize the basics," Marx says, "because we wanted to have the time and freedom to do other things, too."

A Communication Checklist

When designing a communication plan about a testing program, there are a number of public relations principles that are useful to keep in mind. A publication of the National School Public Relations Assn., *Releasing Test Scores: Educational Assessment Programs, How To Tell the Public*, identifies several important principles.

(1) Audiences of an assessment dissemination program are diverse and important for different reasons. Critical audiences should be identified, prioritized and related to the crucial dissemination tasks.

If all assessment information is sent to "the general public," some of the audience will get too detailed information and others will get less than they need. Teachers, for example, need very specific information about the nature of minimal competency tests, while other school staff may be more interested in the overall purpose of the program. Parents are concerned about what will happen if their children fail, and principals are concerned about the way test results will be used.

According to the authors, other potential publics are legislators, school superintendents, education associations, statewide curriculum groups, college professors, citizen groups, students, the media and state department of education staff.

(2) Dissemination must have a purpose. Goals and objectives must be clearly stated and the "targets" of messages must be pinpointed.

Assessment dissemination programs usually have four goals that apply in different degrees to different audiences. The goals are to make people aware; to help people cooperate; to convince people to support; and to assist people to use the program.

(3) Dissemination is more than telling people about something. It is a process using involvement to create a link of understanding between the assessment program and the people it affects. The involvement should begin when the assessment is first proposed; otherwise, problems of lack of commitment and support will surface.

The authors recommend two briefings for local school staff. The first, which should be months before the test, describes the nature of the

program and what the tests should and should not show. When test results become available, another briefing is called to give the staff the news before it is released to the public.

The process should begin with detailed briefings for principals, because they must return and relay the information to their staffs. The principal should give a general briefing to the entire school staff, "outlining the major implications, so that if any employe is confronted by a citizen in the supermarket, he or she will be able to respond confidently, 'Yes, we've already made plans to beef up our reading instruction, but generally we were pretty pleased with the results.' " The authors add that teachers should receive a more detailed explanation, followed by a "give and take session" in which the faculty develops a plan of action based on the scores.

(4) Different audiences have different informational needs. These audiences and needs must be identified and accommodated. In other words, there must be a deliberate attempt to learn the receivers' current attitudes and knowledge—to become receiver-oriented.

To reach the receiver's perspective, the disseminator needs to determine the type of information each audience already has, whether that information is correct, their attitudes toward testing, their opinion of the schools as a source of information, and whether the schools and the audience share the same basic definition of terms.

(5) The credibility of information sources is a critical consideration of dissemination planners.

The authors explain that spokespersons for the assessment should be viewed by their audience as competent and trustworthy. They advise against using statisticians to explain the program, because of the need to use lay language.

(6) Involvement of key people and groups heightens the commitment.

These key people are not only the visible leaders in a school district or state, but also include opinion leaders like a university professor or an influential teacher. In *Releasing Test Scores*, the authors point out that the noninstructional school staff—including secretaries and custodians—should be briefed on the testing program, because they represent the schools among their social groups in the community.

(7) Assessment program disseminators should establish an early working relationship with public relations staff members or consultants.

By collaborating at an early stage, the assessors and communicators can establish ground rules for the release of test results.

(8) Effective dissemination requires adequate human and financial resources.

As a rule of thumb, the authors suggest there should be one dissemination person for every four assessment staff members in a state program or large school district. They estimate that costs for reports, audiovisual materials and travel could run about 10% to 15% of the cost of the assessment program.

(9) Effective dissemination activities need strong evaluation components.

The authors suggest that keeping close tabs on the reactions of various audiences can help in planning future releases and in identifying "loopholes" in the current effort. Keeping a log of telephone calls and a file of letters with a notation of the questions asked can reveal patterns of misunderstandings.

Press Conferences

In *Releasing Test Scores*, the authors suggest preparing brief summaries and tables with test score results to make the information easier to interpret. A press conference can be followed with a two or three day embargo on the release date, which allows reporters more time to analyze and digest the data. "Give the media everything you have," they add. "Don't hide anything. They'll probably find out anyway, and then you'll be in real trouble." They also caution against belittling any of the results or taking a defensive attitude about them.

The superintendent should take charge of the conference and defer to the experts only on technical questions. After the conference, a single spokesperson should be designated with instructions to respond promptly to assessment related questions. The spokesperson should also be prepared to answer the telephone at home at any hour.

Chapter 5.

Trends and Implications

Although states and local school districts are using diverse approaches in meeting the competency challenge, a number of trends are emerging. One is that schools are beginning to test long before high school. In most cases, these tests are considered "checkpoints," rather than determiners of who will be promoted. Omaha and Denver are examples of individual school districts that are looking at benchmark tests. The New Mexico Board of Education is requiring districts to test tenth grade students with an APL test, and to establish checkpoints prior to grade ten.

The purpose of testing in the earlier grades is to identify students who are in need of extra help. A second major trend, then, is remediation. "There needs to be a commitment by staff that there will be remediation so every student will pass," says Supt. H. Vaughn Phelps of the Westside School District in Omaha. "I feel the commitment by the staff is more important than the presence of a test," he says.

A third major trend is an increase in testing and recordkeeping to document the competencies that students have mastered. It is rare for a school district to substitute a competency test for an existing standardized testing program. Rather, the norm among districts is to test four or five grade levels with a norm-referenced standardized test and alternate in other years with criterion-referenced or other tests.

It is clear, however, that there can be too much testing and recordkeeping. Initial guidelines from the Oregon State Board of Education led some districts to develop hundreds of competencies that would be required for graduation. In addition to the actual tabulation of records, the storage of that many competency records would become unmanageable. In June 1976, the board revised its definition of a competency to "a statement of desired student performance representing demonstrable ability to apply knowledge, understanding and/or skills assumed to contribute to success in life role functions." Under the new definition, districts began replacing long lists of skills with competencies that were representative of student abilities to apply skills to life role situations.

In preparing this report, *Education U.S.A.* found very few schools that were substituting competencies for course credit requirements. Not only are schools requiring both, they are tending to increase the number of credit hours and courses required. The Jefferson County, Colo. schools have added economics to the list of required courses. Schools in Racine, Wis., have increased requirements in social studies and English, and Denver schools have tightened English requirements. Instead of permitting students to count drama courses toward the English requirement, Denver graduates must have composition and grammar courses in high school.

The competency movement has also started a trend toward multiple or differentiated diplomas. The Florida accountability law requires local school districts to establish differentiated diplomas. In Idaho, the State Board of Education proposed an optional proficiency test in basic skills. Schools that offer the test can give their graduates diplomas with the State Board of Education seal. Other schools must give certificates of attendance or a plain diploma.

In Hawaii, a task force on graduation requirements reviewed seven options for certifying graduates and has narrowed the field to four options:

- A single diploma coded either "honors," "standard" or "individually prescribed" program (i.e., as for handicapped students).
- A single diploma coded either "standard" or "individually prescribed" program.
- Two documents: a diploma coded "honors" or "standard," and a certificate of completion.
- Three documents: an honors diploma, a standard diploma and a certificate of completion (for the handicapped).

In all cases, the standard certification would require completion of grades 1-12, completion of course credits and mastery of competencies. The honors diploma would also require the student to be in the top 5% of his or her class and to have completed two credits of advanced placement, honors or other advanced course work, according to Michael Hazama, task force chairman. The individually prescribed program (IPP) would include 12 years of school and completion of the prescribed program, including a listing of the competencies achieved. The IPP students would not be required to master all the competencies that are required of regular students.

Hazama says the issue of differentiated diplomas has been controversial within the task force, which includes parents, students, teachers,

administrators and members of the business and labor communities. Members of the committee who are opposed to differentiated diplomas fear that students may be unfairly stigmatized, Hazama says. On the other side are committee members who feel there should be certificates to reflect different levels of achievement.

Social Promotion

Another trend is for districts to do away with automatic or "social" promotions. **Florida's** accountability law bans social promotions and requires school districts to establish programs of pupil progression based on local goals and objectives. In October, every third, fifth, eighth and eleventh grader is given a statewide basic skills test. Teachers work with the students on identified weak spots and promote them if adequate progress is shown. The eleventh grade test is separate from the Functional Literacy Test that is required of students for graduation.

A rural district in **Greensville County, Va.,** abolished social promotions in 1973 and scores on achievement tests have risen significantly. After Supt. Sam Owen flunked more than 1,300 of the district's 3,700 students, people called him "everything from a bigot to a Communist," Owen says. Since that year, the number of retentions has decreased and the average student score on the Science Research Associates Achievement Test has risen from the lower third to slightly above average.

One outspoken critic of the trend towards increased retentions is Gordon Cawelti, executive director of the Assn. for Supervision and Curriculum Development. (ASCD). Writing in *Educational Leadership,* the ASCD magazine, Cawelti cites a review of 44 studies on the subject that concluded, "There is no reliable body of evidence to indicate that grade retention is more beneficial than grade promotion for students with serious academic or adjustment difficulties." Other studies, Cawelti writes, point to harmful social consequences which result from having overage students in a class.

Owen responds to such criticism by saying that students who fail are given a new teacher, new textbooks and a new class with other students their age. The county also has "partial promotions" that allow a student to remain in the fourth grade in math while moving ahead to the fifth grade in reading.

The school district has been criticized by the Virginia chapter of the NAACP, which has charged that the program is a guise to resegregate the schools. More blacks are being retained, which leads to some all black classes. About 65% of Greenville's students are black and only

35% are white. However, black administrators and school board members in the county have generally backed the program. "Our system prevents pushing students from one grade to another whether they are learning or not," says Garland Stith, a black member of the board. "It doesn't matter to me who fails." Owen adds that it's an injustice to send students on when they haven't learned the basics.

Greenville also has an achievement-based promotion policy for secondary students, according to the Council for Basic Education's *Bulletin*. Students in grades eight through twelve take three, rather than six, courses a day in an arrangement called block scheduling. Promotion is based on mastery of the course content, and a student who fails may repeat the course the following semester.

Some educators are critical of the district's heavy reliance on standardized test scores. Director of Instruction Deborah Ranick says promotion is based on teacher observation, teacher-made tests and standardized test scores. It appears, however, that the system is heavily weighted in favor of the tests. Teachers have to give reasons, in writing, if their evaluations differ greatly from the child's test score. "You need some yardstick for measurement," Owen says. "We're not teaching to the test."

The **New Orleans Public Schools** have developed a compromise in their promotion policy. According to Asst. Supt. Julianna Boudreaux, a child may not be retained more than once in primary and once in upper elementary grades. If the child is still not performing, the student may be promoted by mutual agreement of the student, parent, teacher and social worker.

Parent-Student-Teacher Contracts

Although schools have been catching most of the criticism for declining test scores, there is a growing awareness that part of the responsibility rests on the parents' and students' shoulders. At least three school districts have sought to formalize this awareness through student-teacher-parent contracts. The **Lebanon (Ore.) Public Schools** are using contracts as part of their competency-based education program mandated by the state.

Chicago School District 13 has launched an "Excellence Plus" program that includes emphasis on basic skills, a strict discipline code, minimum requirements for dress and appearance, regular homework assignments and minimum requirements for promotion to the sixth grade and to high school. A booklet, *A Passport to Excellence Plus*, contains sections on student and parent responsibilities. Students are

expected to attend class regularly, complete all classroom and homework assignments, and to "respect the staff, show consideration for others and use good manners." Parents are encouraged to meet with teachers to discuss their child's work, and to make sure their children do their homework and come to school on time. It is suggested that they "encourage their children to be good citizens and to use good manners both at home and at school." A contract that goes out from Supt. Alice Blair's office to each student contains a portion parents can sign, tear off and return with their child to school.

The **Oakland (Calif.) Unified School District** has developed a three-way learning contract with all provisions neatly contained in a three-panel brochure. Responsibilities for students, parents and teachers are detailed in academic achievement, interest and motivation, attendance, citizenship and homework.

Within a specific course, student-teacher contracts can be used instead of tests to determine grades or course credits. In a National Education Assn. handbook, *Alternatives to Standardized Testing*, Bernard McKenna and Frances Quinto say that the process of writing a contract can improve the self-image of a poorly motivated student because the student is involved as a decision maker in the selection of activities.

"Completion of the agreement means the student has had a chance to become a partner in the learning process," they write. "It is a chance for the student to gain an understanding of the meaning of accountability." McKenna and Quinto caution that contracts are not "labor-saving devices" and that the contract itself is a process for learning, rather than an "instrument for getting the job done." The contract work should be followed by a teacher-student conference, where both can "cooperatively evaluate the work, choose new assignments and seek to clarify previous or newly-stated objectives." The authors conclude that contract programs are most successful when the objectives are carefully thought out and are understood by all parties before tasks are offered and accepted.

Teacher Performance

A final trend accompanying the competency movement is the increased attention to improving teacher effectiveness. Teacher training programs in many schools are stressing teaching techniques rather than a particular curriculum package.

Several school districts are using programs that are adapted from research by Madeline Hunter, professor of education and principal of the

Oakland Unified School District
Three-Way Learning Contract

THREE-WAY LEARNING CONTRACT

Student

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

1. I will know grade level expectations for specific subjects.
2. I will know my own achievement levels.
3. I will have in class the necessary tools for learning. (Books and other assigned materials.)
4. I will complete assigned work neatly, accurately, and on time.
5. I will use the library and other resources to help me.

INTEREST AND MOTIVATION

1. I will do the best possible work in all times.
2. I will be consistent in my efforts to improve any weakness in my skills.
3. I will take advantage of every opportunity to learn.

ATTENDANCE

1. I will go to classes every day unless ill.
2. I will go to every class on time, and I will remain in class for the full period, unless ill.

CITIZENSHIP

1. I will know and follow district, school, and classroom rules.
2. I will respect the rights of others at all times.
3. I will exhibit a positive attitude toward learning at all times.
4. I will pay attention in class and be respectful of others.

HOMEWORK

1. I will set aside time after school each day to review what I have learned.
2. I will work to improve my study habits.
3. I will complete neatly, accurately, and on time the assigned homework.

OTHER

Signature of Student Date

THREE-WAY LEARNING CONTRACT

Parent/Guardian

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

1. I will know the grade level expectations for my child.
2. I will know the achievement levels of my child.
3. I will review, with my child and his/her teacher, progress during the year.
4. I will seek help from the school when needed.

INTEREST AND MOTIVATION

1. I will encourage and support my child's efforts to learn.
2. I will maintain contact with the school and my child's teacher to whether or not I need help.

ATTENDANCE

1. I will assume responsibility for the regular and prompt attendance of my child.
2. I will make appointments for my child outside of school hours when possible.

CITIZENSHIP

1. I will know and support district and classroom rules for acceptable behavior.
2. I will teach my child to respect the rights and property of others.
3. I will send my child to school with instructions to pay attention in class, and to be respectful.

HOMEWORK

1. I will provide a quiet time and place for study without T.V.
2. I will know the district's homework policy.

OTHER

Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

THREE-WAY LEARNING CONTRACT

Teacher

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

1. I will know and use grade level expectations in teaching.
2. I will interpret grade level expectations to the student and parent.
3. I will know the levels of achievement of the student.
4. I will make and use a basic yearly plan designed to raise the student's achievement level.
5. I will use a daily plan designed to raise the student's achievement level.
6. I will evaluate student progress and report to student and parent at regular intervals.
7. I will have a written grading policy that is available to student and parents at the beginning of the year.

INTEREST AND MOTIVATION

1. I will encourage the student to do his/her best work.
2. I will demonstrate my belief that the student can learn.
3. I will serve as a good example through enthusiasm for teaching and learning.
4. I will reward effort through positive attention.

ATTENDANCE

1. I will maintain good attendance through high quality instruction, relationships, and communication with the student.
2. I will require promptness and regular attendance.
3. I will keep accurate attendance records and maintain communication with the parent.

CITIZENSHIP

1. I will assume responsibility for being sure the student and the parents know the rules of my classroom.
2. I will share, with other teachers and the principal, the responsibility for seeing that student knows school and district rules of behavior.
3. I will enforce all rules fairly and firmly.
4. I will maintain a well managed classroom, conducive to good student behavior.

HOMEWORK

1. I will provide homework designed to reinforce what has been taught in class.
2. I will provide student and parents with written information about the homework policy in my class.

OTHER

Signature of Teacher Date

laboratory school at the U. of California at Los Angeles. The Hunter method explains how to teach to an objective and adjust material to the correct level of difficulty, how to motivate students, and how to manage a classroom efficiently. School principals are trained in the same skills, so they can analyze instruction and make suggestions for improvement.

The **Newport News (Va.) Public Schools** have developed a Program for Effective Teaching (PET) that is modeled after Hunter's training. A group of 24 teachers spend eight days of a 23-day training program at an elementary school in the district. Under the supervision of PET instructors, the teachers work with students at the elementary school, using principles learned in the training. Teachers then return to try the techniques in their own classrooms, where they are observed and advised by PET instructors. Completion of the training gives teachers three non-college credit hours which can be used as three of the six semester hours required for certificate renewal.

According to Raymond Melton, assistant superintendant for instructional services, PET has improved teacher morale by providing "a central focus and vocabulary which is common throughout the district. A major factor has been that school principals received the training before the teachers and had to practice their instructional skills with students," he says. "This has added credibility to the program so teachers know their administrator possesses the skills and techniques they are supposed to be using."

In **Denver,** a pilot inservice program trains elementary and secondary teachers in some of Hunter's techniques, plus individualized instruction and increasing teacher skills in dealing with student feelings, attitudes and values. "We wondered why so many good techniques in education are not used by teachers," says Dorothy Major, coordinator of Denver's Dept. of Elementary Education. She says it's because "no one has taught them how to use these theories in the classroom."

Denver's Instructional Improvement Program also shows teachers how to use the principles of mastery learning. The premise behind mastery learning is that all children can learn a skill if given enough time. Each learning task is broken down into smaller component parts. For children who still do not understand, "correctives" are offered which explain the concept in a different way. And "extension activities" are planned for those who are ready for a higher level of activity.

As in Newport News, Va., the Denver training program begins with eight days of instruction, during which teachers are relieved of their regular duties. After the concepts are taught, teachers return to their classrooms to use the principles, and they are observed and advised by project staff. "The followup is absolutely critical," says Sandy Shane,

project manager. "It helps explain things that may have been misunderstood and it gives reinforcement." Administrators receive the same training, plus Hunter's course in the "clinical supervision skills" of counseling and conferences with teachers.

In **New Orleans,** Project REAL (Reading for Enjoyment And Learning) trains teachers in the theory of reading and in techniques of individualization, diagnosis and prescription. According to Asst. Supt Adams Koroma, the program has resulted in "educationally significant gains" in elementary reading scores.

Atlanta has a reading center staffed with specialists who help students part of the day and spend the rest of their time working with teachers. Asst. Supt, Sidney Estes says the teachers learn to teach reading in the content areas of other subjects. A school system committee developed a list of "required" and "desired" skills in the reading process. Teachers are told to make the "required" list a priority, Estes says.

Problems with Competencies

As more states board the competency bandwagon, the inevitable problems are beginning to come to light. In **Virginia,** educators are urging the state legislature to delay or amend the state's competency law, which requires testing for grade-to-grade promotions. According to J.A. Simones of the Virginia Assn. of School Administrators, the policy threatens to reinstitute segregation and the state should include money for remedial instruction.

The **New York** State Board of Regents has delayed a state competency test because the proposed questions were considered too easy. The test included such "pushovers" as: "How many pennies are in $4.00?" and "What time is it when the clock reads 1:35?" Students have a choice of four answers. "The test is laughable and deceptive," complains J. Edward Meyer, a regent from Westchester County. "It's telling kids they don't need very much to get a high school diploma."

A legislative task force in **Oregon** has asked the State Board of Education to delay implementation of competencies required for the class of 1981 and to take a hard look at the basic skills competencies required for the 1978 graduating class. "There's a lot of feeling among some teachers, some students and some members of the public that the system's not working very well," says state Sen. Clifford Trow, chairman of the task force. One problem is that district competencies vary considerably in number and quality. There are 333 different districts in the state, whose requirements range from nine to almost 300 competencies.

The 1978 graduating class in Oregon "hasn't had the opportunity to meet the competencies gradually, and problems of record-keeping are diverting teachers from their normal teaching duties," he says. The lack of uniformity creates problems for the 20% to 25% of students who transfer each year and the "specificity" of the competencies may make it easier to sue for teacher malfeasance, Trow says.

The Oregon task force conducted five hearings with more than 80 witnesses. "There was testimony from a number of experts in competency-based education (CBE) who indicated it was almost a revolution in terms of curriculum that would be all-inclusive eventually," the senator says. One of the task force's 12 recommendations was that the CBE not be allowed to "dominate the curriculum" and crowd out other useful teaching techniques and approaches.

The task force called for increased attention to remediation and urged that the competency requirements should be "a floor to educational achievement (which) should not be allowed to become so important that it lowers the ceiling." The task force asked the state board to review the performance of the class of 1978 and continue basic skills competencies only if there is "substantial evidence" that the graduation requirements have been "educationally beneficial to the students and have had a positive effect upon the schools."

The task force recommended that research be conducted on:

- The effect that CBE has on staffing patterns.
- Problems of implementation.
- Resources needed for appropriate record-keeping.
- The range, quantity and quality of minimum competencies.
- Student mobility and transfer patterns.
- Followup studies of graduates of 1978, 1979 and 1980.
- Fiscal impact of the program.
- Changes in curricula required by implementation.
- Problems created for students having to show compliance with the competencies.

The Oregon Board of Education had already planned to review the competencies in 1978 and adopt revisions. One concern expressed over the task force recommendations is that they will encourage school districts opposed to competencies to resist the program.

Implications for the Curriculum

On the plus side, the competency movement has led to increased communication among teachers at various grade levels to articulate a curriculum that is sequential and consistent. Another benefit is that schools are focusing more on the goals of education and are involving the community in setting those goals. When this happens, resources are likely to be allocated more effectively as every school works towards the same purposes.

The competency movement is beneficial from the standpoint that it focuses the curriculum effort on basic skills, says Gordon Cawelti, executive director of the Assn. for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). "The vast majority of secondary schools are probably paying inadequate attention to reading," he says. Beyond focusing on basic skills, however, Cawelti is "dubious" that the competency movement will be helpful. "We need a more intensive hunt for effective methods," he says. "It's significant that there's no breakthrough . . . no school says that 95% of its children are reading well."

Cawelti fears that the competency movement will "further trivialize secondary education with a curriculum that is already regarded as largely irrelevant by many students." He is critical of questions on the Adult Performance Level Exam that tests knowledge of govenment and law in skill areas like reading, writing, and identification of facts and terms. "Isn't it much more significant that students have understood Sen. (George) McGovern's position on the Vietnam war than for South Dakota students to know that he is their senator?" he asks.

Cawelti and others predict that minimal competencies will have a narrowing effect on the school curriculum. According to Dwight Cool, director of assessment and evaluation for the Jefferson County, Colo., schools, "The fact that standardized tests test the three basic areas of reading, language usage and mathematics has caused some schools to spend most of their efforts on these areas, and to neglect some other important areas of instruction. Actually, an integrated curriculum could lead to effective learning of the basic skills plus the content of other programs. However, this idea has been slow to catch on, so the central administration is now pushing for a more coordinated but more comprehensive curriculum."

Cool adds, however, that the effort to set objectives, strategies and evaluation procedures in reading, language arts and math has led to greater focus on the individual learner's progress; more consistent efforts to improve programs; more comprehensive reporting to the school board and community on the outcomes of instruction; a more precise set of assessment data by which to judge the effectiveness of

programs; a greater emphasis on record keeping; and a more coordinated sequential progression of objectives in each K-12 program.

Denver, which has required the Proficiency and Review Test for 18 years, has not suffered a narrower curriculum. "There are more high school course offerings today than 10 years ago," says Gerald Cavanaugh, former supervisior of testing and now a principal in the district.

The competency movement may narrow the curriculum from the perspective of individual students. In Arizona, students must be able to read, write and compute at the sixth-grade level before they can receive an eighth-grade certificate, and they must perform these skills at a ninth-grade level before they can graduate from high school. Carolyn Scott, assistant superintendent for instruction in the Phoenix Union High School System, notes that such requirements may accelerate the dropout rate. "These kids are so loaded with remedial courses," they have no chance to get into humanities or other courses that might keep them in school, she says.

Another complaint is that many states are paying inadequate attention to instructional changes that may need to be made to accommodate the tests. "It should be of little surprise that 15% or 20% of the students in a typical high school might fail a proficiency test if the competencies elicited are not part of the curriculum," Cawelti writes in ASCD's *Educational Leadership*. "Analysis of state legislation has shown that only in two or three instances has any provision been made for the new instructional requirements required for the new goals." Cawelti also notes that minimums may become maximums, lulling "average students into a kind of complacency." The state of Wisconsin is addressing this problem by asking local school districts to set "minimum" and "optimum" competency levels for its students.

Teacher Concerns

One major concern teachers have with the competency movement is that student test scores could be used as tools to evaluate teachers. This would be unfair because it disregards student responsibility and motivation and basic difference in ability levels among students, they say.

Also, standardized tests are unreliable measures of a student's performance, says Mark Horney, sixth grade teacher in the Aurora (Colo.) Public Schools. Teacher-made competency tests are not the answer, however, because most teachers are not trained in test-making. In his sixth grade class, Horney says he has reading levels ranging from pre-primary to 12th grade. "How are they going to write a test suitable

for all?" he asks. "Individualization is a good idea," he adds, "but I don't have enough time to write materials, put together and administer" such a program. In Horney's school, which is near a military base, the student turnover is about 30% a year. "If you can solve all these problems, then (Competency Based Education) is a good idea," he says. "But nobody is trying to address these problems." Horney adds that if minimal competency is tied to raises or teaching jobs, teachers will concentrate on the minimums and exclude other skills. Children who have achieved will be ignored because such a high priority is placed on reaching the children at the low achieving end.

"Competency-based education breeds mediocrity, test-wise kids and test-wise teachers," says Lee Bridgeman, president of the Aurora (Colo.) Education Assn. "It does not breed creativity and innovation." And Irene Clarke, a teacher in Wyoming, says teachers should be involved in setting minimum standards. Competency standards should not be the only graduation requirement, she adds, or it will destroy student motivation to get good grades and the minimum will become the maximum. Clarke is opposed to multiple diplomas because there would be a "stigma" attached to a certificate of attendance.

Funding

States that are establishing minimal competency systems should be careful not to build a negative incentive into their funding mechanisms, warns Michigan state Sen. Jack Faxon. "If you give money to schools where scores are low, teachers whose scores rise work their way out of a job," he explains. This effect can be minimized by appropriating funds for remediation for three years, instead of a single budget year. Such a time sequence allows more opportunity to see improvement, he says.

For the long term, Faxon favors increased funding at the elementary level so there will be less need for remediation at the upper grades. "The cost factor multiplies" the later you get to the student, he says. "We've always focused on secondary schools for advanced training and rewards. Elementary schools have never been given the status they deserve," he asserts. "We shouldn't neglect those who need remediation," but the ultimate goal should be increased funding for elementary schools and preschool experiences.

And states that have not appropriated funds for competency remediation should not count on the federal government to pick up the tab. In a letter to Hayes Mizell of the Southeastern Public Education Fund at Columbia, S.C., the U.S. Office of Education said Title I funds could not be used to help students who fail state minimum competency

requirements. Even if the students are eligible for Title I, such a use would "supplant" state funds with federal money, the agency said.

Tracking

In the *Education U.S.A.* survey, school administrators were asked if remediation programs for students failing competency tests had led to tracking. Many districts have avoided the "tracking trap" through the use of learning labs, which isolate low-achievers for limited periods of time. Such students are enrolled in regular classes for a majority of the day. On the issue of self-esteem, several administrators commented that students who lacked basic skills already suffered low esteem, which could be raised only when their skills improved.

Denver students who fail portions of the Proficiency and Review Test must attend a reading or math laboratory one period a day for a semester. In many schools, the labs are run by the department chairperson, says Allan Hosler, the district's supervisor of testing.

The Denver learning labs have a student-teacher ratio of about 15 to 1. The labs are sometimes staffed with aides as well as teachers. Some high school students are helped by peer tutors, who receive five hours of credit for helping other students one period a day for a semester. The tutors act much like an aide, working one-to-one with another student. "The top students are not the best tutors," Hosler notes. Sometimes other students tend to have more patience.

Conclusion

Competency activity in the states and in local school districts has been described as a constantly changing landscape. Under such conditions, it is impossible to know for certain what its long term effects on education will be. Since competency emerged for diverse reasons and with differing approaches, it is likely the movement will have both positive and negative effects. One of the optimists is Ramon Cortines, former superintendent of the Pasadena (Calif.) School District. Pasadena has been on "both ends" on the competency movement—embracing back-to-basics with one of the first fundamental schools in the nation, and now pursuing the goals-and-objectives route through its minimum essentials program.

Cortines predicts that minimum competency standards will have four positive effects: 1) it will force school systems to be responsive to children's needs, making schools cover the curriculum and not teach by the 'seat of our pants.'; 2) it will force administrators to know what is happening in the schools, making both administrators and teachers accountable; 3) kids who want to graduate will know that they now have to put forth some effort to get something; 4) it will force parents to be involved."

Cortines observes that parents the schools could never reach before will certainly become more interested if it appears that their child may not graduate.

Balancing this optimistic view is a note of caution from a big city curriculum director who fears that competency-based education is being "sold" as a panacea. He predicts that "no amount of teaching effectiveness" will bring every single student up to the minimum standard, and says this failure will lead to yet another public disillusionment. "We need to capitalize on the best the competency movement can give us," he says. "But we shouldn't promise too much."

Appendix

NAEP Test Items: A Competency Resource

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) receives federal funding to test students in 10 subject areas. After each assessment, approximately half the test items are released and may be used by local school districts that wish to compare their performance with national results. Sample questions from each assessment are published as demonstration packages which may be ordered from NAEP.

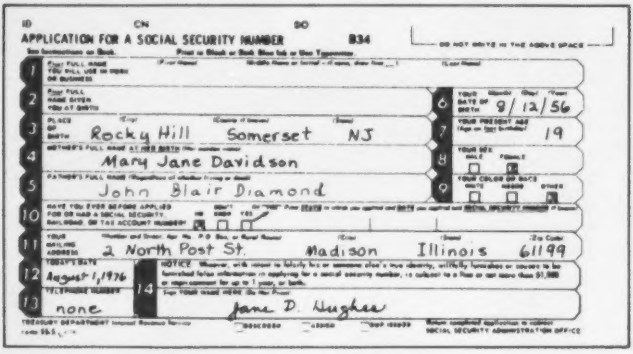
The regular assessments are not intended as minimum competency tests, however, so the questions in demonstration packages cover a range of difficulty. For this reason, NAEP asked a group of state and local educators to review the released math and reading exercises to identify those that may be appropriate for minimal competency tests. The panel selected 33 reading items and 96 math items.

Below are some typical reading and math questions from the group the educators selected.

3. Lee wants to read a book about plumbing so he can fix his sink. He doesn't want to buy the book. Where should he go to get it?

   A. Local bookstore
   B. Public library
   C. Plumbers' supply store
   D. United Fund office

5. Jane Diamond Hughes is applying for a Social Security number. What name should Jane put in the space labeled 1?



   A. Jane D. Hughes
   B. Hughes, Jane D.
   C. Jane Diamond
   D. Diamond, Jane

6. What does it mean when people have the *right of way* in traffic?

   A. They must stay in the right lane.
   B. They must turn right at the next corner.
   C. They have the right to turn in any direction they choose.
   D. They do not have to yield to cross traffic.

MC
801 What number is 1000 more than 3425?

- ⬭ 3425
- ⬭ 3525
- ⬭ 4325
- ⬬ 4425
- ⬭ I don't know.

AGE	%
13	85
17	89

MC
802 A. Which number is the GREATEST?

- ⬭ 0.5
- ⬭ 0.05
- ⬬ 5.0
- ⬭ 0.005
- ⬭ I don't know.

AGE	%
13	82
17	93

B. Which number is the SMALLEST?

- ⬭ 2.002
- ⬬ 0.022
- ⬭ 0.202
- ⬭ 0.22
- ⬭ I don't know.

AGE	%
13	31
17	54
Adult	58

MC
020 A turkey is to be cooked 20 minutes for each pound. If a turkey weighing $12\frac{1}{2}$ pounds is to be done by 5:00 p.m., what time should it be put in to cook?

ANSWER 12:50 p.m.

AGE	%
17	37
Adult	42

A. Under what heading would you look to locate the reviews of a current movie?

- ⬬ Cinema
- ⬭ Television
- ⬭ Business
- ⬭ Theater
- ⬭ I don't know.

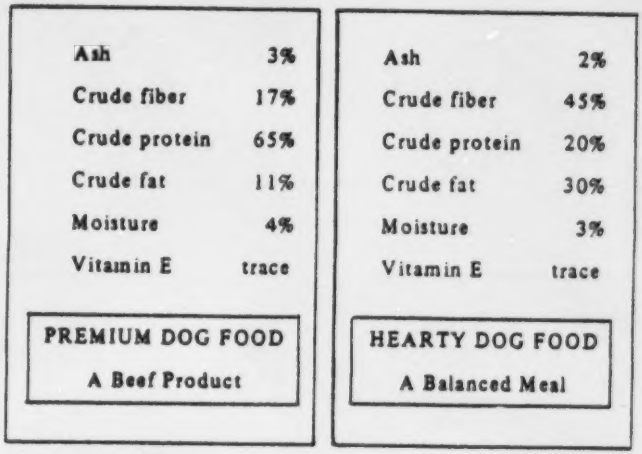
AGE	%
13	26
17	63

MC
C02 What is the BEST way to find out if there is something about Eskimos in a book?

- (●) Look in the index.
- ( ) Look in the glossary.
- ( ) Look at the title page.
- ( ) Look through all the pages.
- ( ) Skim through the introduction.
- ( ) I don't know.

AGE	%
9	48
13	68

MC
A05 Look at the labels from two cans of dog food. One can has more protein in it than the other. Fill in the oval below the dog food that contains more protein.



(●) (○)

( ) I don't know.

AGE	%
9	67
13	81
17	92

NAEP Basic Life Skills

NAEP conducted a one-time "probe" of basic life skills in the spring of 1977. All the exercises have been released. Test questions cover personal finance and consumer protection, health maintenance, interpersonal relationships, family responsibility and career development skills. Kits are available with test booklets, answer sheets and a guide for conducting an assessment using the NAEP exercises. (Ordering information for NAEP materials is found under Selected Resources, p. 96)

22. **Last year you joined a record club. You have fulfilled your obligation to buy a specified number of records. You have called the record club and asked to be removed from the mailing list. However, the record club continues to send records despite your phone call. Which of the following actions would be appropriate for you to take and which would not be appropriate?**

	Appropriate Action	Not Appropriate Action	I don't know.
A. Keep the records and refuse to pay any bills for the records.	(1)	(2)	(3)
B. Send a registered letter asking to be removed from the mailing list.	(1)	(2)	(3)
C. Pay for the records that came after your phone call, and call again requesting that the company stop sending the records.	(1)	(2)	(3)
D. Refuse to accept the records and have the post office return the records to the company.	(1)	(2)	(3)

10. Which of the following rights are guaranteed all U.S. citizens at the age of 18 and which are not?

	Guaranteed	Not Guaranteed	I don't know.
A. The right to vote in national elections	(1)	(2)	(3)
B. The right to vote in local and state elections	(1)	(2)	(3)
C. The right to marry without parental consent	(1)	(2)	(3)
D. The right to make binding financial contracts	(1)	(2)	(3)

15.

A. The person in the picture above is using an incorrect technique in applying artificial respiration. Which one of the following describes the incorrect technique?

(1) Tilting the victim's head backward

(2) Blowing air into the victim's mouth

(3) Not pinching closed the victim's nostrils

(4) Placing the victim on his back during respiration

(5) I don't know.

82

31. You are babysitting for your neighbors, whose children are five and seven years old. While they are sleeping, your best friend calls. Your friend lives several blocks away and asks you to come over and discuss a very serious problem. What is the best thing for you to do?

(1) Assume that the children will remain asleep, and go to your friend's home.

(2) Tell your friend that you are responsible for the children, then encourage your friend to discuss the problem on the phone.

(3) Wake up the children and take them with you.

(4) Invite the friend to come over, even though the children's parents have told you not to have your friends over at anytime.

(5) I don't know.

32. A. A good attitude to take in interviewing for a job is to

(1) act unconcerned, so that the interviewer will not think you are too eager.

(2) appear to be interested in the job and ready to accept it.

(3) show concern mostly for the salary.

(4) explain to the interviewer what a nice guy you are.

B. "OPEN SHOP" is a term which means

(1) the shop is open 24 hours a day.

(2) members of any race can work there.

(3) no one has to join a union.

(4) customers can shop there without a membership.

State Activity
Minimal Competency Testing

Department of Research and Information Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colorado
March 15, 1978

STATE	ACTION TAKEN	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TEST	COMMENTS
Alabama	State Board Resolution 1977.	*State Department of Education.	9th-12th	*Basic skills state test	For high school graduation.	*The State Superintendent of Education has appointed a committee of 100 to study and make recommendations on standards, the test and high school diploma issue. These recommendations are due 7-1-78.
Arizona	State Dept. of Education Ruling.	Set by the State Dept. of Educ. Assessment by Local District. No statewide test prescribed.	8th Grade 12th Grade	Reading, Writing, Computation	For graduation from 8th and 12th grades.	Effective January 1, 1976, students must be able to read, write and compute at the 6th grade level to receive the standard 8th grade certificate and at the 9th grade level for high school graduation.

California	(early exit test) SB 1112—1972 SB 1243—1975 SB 1502—1976	Test and cut-off standards set by the California Department of Education.	Age 16 to adult Test once between 7-9 and twice between grades 10-11.	Process areas of reading and computation content areas: consumer economics and mathematics.	Award high school diploma and leave school with parent permission.	Title of program: California High School Proficiency Test. Test administration and security handled under contract with private testing corporation.
	AB 3408—Ch. 856 1976	State Board to supply performance indicators and examples of minimum standards. Local districts set graduation standards.		Reading, Writing, Computation	For high school graduation.	The act also prescribes course of study requirements. In effect for the graduation class of 1980.
	AB 65, Ch. 894	Local districts	Once between Grades 4-6; once between Grades 7-9; twice between Grades 10 & 11.	Reading comprehension, writing, computation skills	For remediation and grade promotion decisions.	This law is to move California into elementary grade testing.
Colorado	SB 180-1975 C.R.S. 22-32-109.5	Local boards	9-12—test twice a year.	Local district option	Local district option for high school graduation.	If a local board of education imposes a proficiency test for high school graduation, it must follow the stipulations of this act.

STATE	ACTION TAKEN	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TEST	COMMENTS
Connecticut	State Board Resolution, Nov. 1977 (Early exit program).	State department using existing GED and APL test standards.	16-year-olds	Academic: General Educational Development (GED) test. Life Skills: Adult Performance Level (APL) test.	With appropriate counseling and follow-up teaching, students can leave school with a high school equivalency diploma.	Final implementation contingent upon $300,000 appropriation from legislature in 1978.
Delaware	State Board of Education Resolution 1976.	State Department of Education, after baseline test is given.	Baseline instrument grade 11 1978	Level II Competencies, i.e.: the application of reading, writing and mathematics.	For high school graduation.	The development of the baseline testing instrument has been awarded to a private test contractor.
Florida	CSSB 340—1975 F.S. 229.814 CSSB 107—1976 F.S. 76.226	State and local boards.	Grades 3, 5, 8 and 11.	Basis skill areas. Functional literacy.	For high school graduation, grade promotion and early exit from high school.	Titled: The Educational Accountability Act. Places ban on social promotion.
Georgia	State Board of Education action.	State Board and State Department.	Grades 4, 8 and 11.	Grades 4 & 8: reading, math, social studies and science. High school test under development.	The State Board of Education has not taken final action on the use of the tests.	The student assessment program is part of a long-range plan to fund local school districts through a program of comprehensive planning.

Idaho	State Board of Education resolution.	State Board of Education	Grades 9-12.	Reading, writing, arithmetic and spelling	For high school graduation at the option of local districts.	Students passing the proficiency program will receive a diploma with the state board seal. In districts not participating, students will receive district diploma.
Indiana	State Board Resolution adopted Feb. 1978.	To be set by local districts with advisory committee of teachers, administrators, parents and community members.	3, 6, 8 & 10.	Reading	Primarily for remediation. Local district may use for other purposes.	Rules and regulations supporting this resolution awarding attorney general's and governor's approval. 3/14/78
Kansas	State Board of Education ruling, January 1978.	State Dept. of Education will set standards and goals with assistance of local districts.	3, 6, 9 & 12.	Academic skills: reading and mathematics, grades 3, 6 & 9. Life Skills; Grade 12	Local District Option.	Legislation is pending which has a good chance of passing yet in 1978. This could alter some aspects of the State Board mandate.
Kentucky	State Board of Education adopted 4-yr. competency plan. 1977.	State Department with task force assistance.	Grades 3, 5, 8 and 11.	Criterion referenced test in reading, writing and arithmetic.	For high school graduation and grade promotion.	
Louisiana	HB 810 Act 709, 1976	State Superintendent of Schools.	Grades 4, 8 and 11.	Basic communication and computational skill areas with criterion referenced test.	No mention of graduation or grade promotion.	Requirements a part of the accountability and assessment law.

STATE	ACTION TAKEN	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TEST	COMMENTS
Maine	Enacted, amended, LD 1810, Ch. 78 of the Private Special Laws.	State Department of Education.	Grade 11	(See Comments)	For high school graduation.	The law specifies that the Commissioner of Education is to be assisted in the development of the assessment instrument and the areas to be tested by a state-wide committee. The law names the organizations to be represented.
Maryland	HB 1433, M.A.C., Art. 77, Sec. 980—1976 and HB 1462, Ch. 559—1977	State Board of Education.	Grades 2-12 Grades 3, 7, 9 & 11.	Reading	For grade promotion and high school graduation.	Students not meeting minimum requirements may be retained in some grade or enrolled in remedial program.
Michigan	State Department of Education.	State Department of Education.	Grades 4, 7, 10.	Reading and Math.	For local district use.	12th grade minimal competency test, covering life role skills under study.
Missouri	State Board of Education.	State Department of Education.	Grade 8	The application of reading, mathematics and government/ economics skills.	No mandate for graduation or grade promotion.	The Basic Education Skills test, developed by the Department of Education, has been field tested in grades 8, 10 and 12.

Nebraska	State Department of Education.	Local School Districts.	Begins in Grade 5 and continues until mastery is achieved by each student in each skill area.	Reading, writing and mathematics.	State developed test *is not* to be used for grade retention or promotion.	Local school districts may use the Nebraska Assessment Battery of Essential Learning Skills (N-ABELS) or develop their own test.
Nevada	AB 400—1977	State Board of Education.	Grades 6, 9 & 12.	Reading, writing and mathematics.	For high school graduation.	Students may be promoted to the next grade if examination is failed but remedial work is to be provided.
New Hampshire	State Department of Education.	State Department of Education.	Grade 4. Grade 8 & 12 under development.	Communications and mathematics.	Grade promotion and high school graduation *not mentioned*.	Program is to serve as guidelines for local school districts.
New Jersey	A. 1736, Ch. 97—1976 State Department of Education.	State State Department of Education.	3, 6, 9 & 11.	Reading and mathematics. Reading and mathematics. Life skills under study.	Student diagnosis and remedial identification. Identification of students needing instructional assistance.	Local districts are to provide remedial assistance in order for students to meet state standards. Development of testing instrument is under contract to a private test development company.

STATE	ACTION TAKEN	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TEST	COMMENTS
New Mexico	State Board of Education.	State	Elementary level, grade choice up to local district and grade 10.	Elementary: Local option. Secondary: Proficiency battery based on adult performance level (APL) and a writing sample.	Proficiency endorsement on high school diploma if test is passed.	The state department of education is working on a series of basic skill area curriculum guides.
New York	State Board of Regents.	State Board of Regents.	Grades 9-12.	Reading and mathematics with a criterion referenced test; also, civics and citizenship, practical science, health & drug education and writing and language skills.	For high school graduation.	The New York Department of Education also administers the Regents Diploma Program and the pupil evaluation plan (PEP) both related to measuring student performance in the basic skill areas.
North Carolina	Enacted, HB204 Enacted HB 205	By Competency Test Commission created by law. By Competency Test Commission (separate from HB 204).	Grade 11 beginning in 1978-79. Grades 1 & 2 criterion referenced test. Grades 3, 6 & 9 "Norm" referenced test.	To be determined by the Competency Test Commission. (See Comments) To be determined by the Competency Test Commission	For high school graduation. To be determined by the Competency Test Commission.	The test is to measure "those skills and that knowledge thought necessary to enable an individual to function independently and successfully in assuming the responsibilities of citizenship."

Oregon	State Board of Education 1972.	Local Districts.	District Option.	Reading, writing and computation. Local option for personal development, social responsibility and career development.	For high school graduation.	Graduation requirements are based on course credit, attendance and required competencies in personal, social and career areas.
Oklahoma	State Board of Education.	Decision will follow baseline data test.	Grades 3, 6, 9. Grade 12	Reading Survival Skills	Decision will follow baseline data test.	The baseline test instrument will be given to 15,000 students in the fall of 1977.
Rhode Island	State Department of Education.		Grades 4, 8 and age 17 used in pilot test.	Comprehension Analysis and Evaluation known as the "life skills"	For local district and state department use. Competency based high school diploma under study.	The Rhode Island master plan for evaluation and the statewide assessment program have jointly contributed to the pilot testing in the life skills areas.
Tennessee	State Board of Education Nov. 10, 1977. State Board of Education Nov. 10, 1977.	State Department of Education. Local districts	Grades 11 & 12. Grades 4, 5 6 and 8.	Reading, math, grammar and spelling. Subjects at discretion of local district.	For high school graduation, Class of 1982. Remediation	Two different programs were established in the same court ruling.

STATE	ACTION TAKEN	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TEST	COMMENTS
Utah	State Board of Education January 1977.	Local district	Local district	Reading, writing, speaking, listening, arithmetic, democratic governance, consumerism, problem solving.	For high school graduation, Class of 1980.	Local districts will choose the test and set the cut-off standards.
Vermont	State Board of Education.	State Board of Education.	Continuous	Reading, writing, speaking, listening, and mathematics. Area of reasoning is under study.	For high school graduation.	Mastery of the basic competencies is to be one requirement for graduation unless student has a limiting handicap.
Virginia	State Board of Education ruling.	Broad: State Specific: Local		Functional literacy in communicative skills—reading, writing and speaking. Computational skills, history and cultures of United States including processes of democratic governance and economic system. Ability to pursue higher education or gain employment.	For high school graduation, Class of 1981, and remediation.	It is assumed that local districts will choose grade or grade levels to test. State mandates it be done before graduation.

	HB 256—1976	State Board of Education in cooperation with local districts.	All grades yearly with first emphasis in grades K-6.	Reading, communications and mathematics.	To measure progress of individual students.	Act known as The Standard of Quality Act.
Washington	SB 3026 HB 1345—1976	Local districts	4th and 8th	Standardized achievement test in reading, mathematics and language arts.	For school district and parent use.	School districts are encouraged to develop a separate test for second grade for the early identification of pupils needing assistance in language and computational skills.
Wyoming	State Board of Education policy.	Local districts will establish specific standards.		Reading, writing and computing with proficiency. Process and structure of democratic governance and free enterprise.	For high school graduation.	The start-up date and rules and regulations are to be drawn up by the State Department of Education. Local districts will verify the state standards and are encouraged to go beyond the minimum standards set by the State Board of Education.

Selected Resources

AMERICAN COLLEGE TESTING (ACT)
2201 North Dodge St.
PO Box 168
Iowa City, Iowa 52240
Telephone: (319) 356-3711
Contact: Tom Mann

The Adult Performance Level (APL) tests developed by the APL Project in Texas can be used in grades 9-12 as well as for adults. Tests cover the five general knowledge areas of occupational knowledge, consumer economics, health, community resources, and government and law and the five skill areas of identification of facts and terms, reading, writing, computation, and problem solving. ACT can customize the APL tests to meet state and local district needs and interests.

ATLANTA ASSESSMENT PROJECT
Instructional Services Center
2930 Forrest Hill Drive SW
Atlanta, Ga. 30315
Telephone: (404) 761-5411
Contact: Ray L Sweigert Jr.

The Atlanta Assessment Project has 96 objective-based and criterion referenced test forms which contain almost 3,600 items. These items measure the achievement of nearly 700 objectives representing 120 goals in 14 goal areas. They are designed to measure achievement at a minimal level necessary for coping with life in the society of 1985. Inquiries about obtaining items or tests should be directed to the project office.

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR APPLIED PERFORMANCE TESTING (CAPT)
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
710 SW Second Ave.
Portland, Ore. 97204
Telephone: (503) 248-6946
Contact: Dean Nafziger, Director

CAPT was established to help provide educators rapid access to applied performance tests and related documents, along with current information on developments in the field. The bimonthly *CAPT Newsletter* is available on request. The Clearinghouse has a collection of tests in several subject areas which can be obtained on a cost-reimbursement basis at $0.10 per page. Two reference documents are available to aid users in their search for tests and other materials: *The Annotated Bibliography on Applied Performance Testing* lists the collection of available material in the CAPT Library and *References Related to Applied Performance Testing*. Both of these documents are free.

EDUCATIONAL TESTING SERVICE (ETS)
Princeton, NJ 08540 Contact: Pam Rosen
Telephone: (609) 921-9000

The ETS Test Collection is an extensive library of tests and other measurement devices. The collection presently comprises over 10,000 instruments which are available on-site. Inquire at ETS for procedures for assessing materials in the test collection.

Notification about recent acquisitions to the collections, and announcements of new services are provided in the quarterly *Test Collection Bulletin* ($2.00 per year). Other publications of the ETS Test Collection include the July 1973 free bibliography *Criterion-Referenced Measures* and *Major U.S. Publishers of Standardized Tests.*

HOUGHTON-MIFFLIN CO.
PO Box 1970 Telephone: (319) 354-5104
Iowa City, Iowa 52240 Contact: Loleta Hall (SCORE); Ed Drahozal (IPMS)

SCORE (School Criterion Objective-Referenced Evaluation) is a customized test service for grades 1-8 in Reading/Language Arts and Math. Schools select objectives from a catalogue and the publisher selects up to three test items per objective. A scoring service can provide item analysis for classroom use. The Individual Pupil Monitoring System (IPMS) is an "off the shelf" test. There are five reading/language arts test items per objective and 10 math items per objective.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES EXCHANGE (IOX)
10884 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 305 Telephone: (213) 474-4531
Los Angeles, Calif. 90025 Contact: Elaine Lindheim

IOX has published collections of measurable objectives in varied subject and skill areas at grade levels K through 12, currently covering 13 major cognitive topic areas including language arts, mathematics, business education, social studies, and the natural sciences. IOX criterion-referenced tests are also available. Each boxed set contains preprinted spirit masters for approximately 40 tests. Individual tests (except affective measures) consist of five or ten items. Most sets are available in two forms.

The IOX Basic Skill Tests measure minimal competency at the secondary school level in the basic skill areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. Two 45-minute forms with reusable test booklets are available. Catalogues for objectives and tests can be obtained from, and orders placed with, the Instructional Objectives Exchange, Distribution Center, P.O. Box 24095, Los Angeles, CA 90024.

MINIMUM ESSENTIALS IN ENGLISH AND MATH
Pasadena Unified School District
351 S. Hudson Ave.
Pasadena, Calif. 91109

Pasadena's Minimum Essentials in English and Math programs are articulated courses of study covering the primary skills expected of students at grades seven through 10. (Booklets for grades 11 and 12 will be ready in September, 1978.) Student booklets contain exercises and practice questions geared to the interest level of the student. Teacher guides contain suggested teaching strategies and an explanation of the Minimum Essentials programs. Discounts are given for quantity orders.

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS
Educational Commission of the States
1860 Lincoln St., Suite 700
Denver, Colo. 80295
Telephone: (303) 861-4917
Contact: Vern A. Achtermann

Math Resource Items for Minimal Competency Testing (96 items with national scores for age groups), $7.40

Reading Resource Items for Minimal Competency Testing, 33 items with national scores, $6.20

Basic Life Skills Kit. Six NAEP assessment booklets covering personal finance and consumer protection, health maintenance, inter-personal, family responsibility and career development skills. Also contains a guide for conducting an assessment using the NAEP exercises, $17.00

NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEMS, INC. (NES)
PO Box 226
Amherst, Mass. 01002
Telephone: (413) 256-0444
Contact: William P. Gorth, President

National Evaluation Systems, Inc. is a non-profit research and evaluation agency using criterion-referenced educational testing and customized evaluation services. They have provided evaluation data for clients in more than 25 states. Minimum competency tests have been developed for several large school districts. NES has developed tests in many areas including reading, mathematics, career education, and consumer education at the elementary, secondary, and college levels.

OREGON COMPETENCY BASED EDUCATION PROGRAM
3000 Market Street NE
Suite 323
Salem, Ore. 97301
Telephone: (503) 585-3603
Contact: Bob Gourley

The Oregon Competency Based Education (CBE) Program is currently in the process of developing and refining materials that support the competency based education movement in Oregon and in other states. The 500 page *Competency Based Education Sourcebook* ($22.50) is a comprehensive and current guide for curriculum planners, administrators, teachers, and others involved in program planning, and implementation of competency based education.

PROJECT STAMM
Jefferson County Schools Mathematics Department
1209 Quail St.
Lakewood, Colo. 80215

STAMM is a continuous progress, criterion-referenced math program for kindergarten through high school trigonometry. The program has been validated by the U.S. Office of Education and National Institute of Education National Diffusion Network. Districts can order teachers resource packets, course guides or a sampler kit containing all the objectives, competencies and sample resource packets, tests, record keeping forms and a model for teacher training.